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Exploring the contemplative: A meditative self-inquiry of Individual Consultations practice

Tao Bak

Student Outcomes, Student Success, Deakin University, Melbourne, Victoria 3125, Australia
tao.bak@deakin.edu.au

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Reflective practice is routinely used to enhance the development of skills and understandings in professional settings. The contemplative-spiritual perspective is a recent addition to more traditional forms of reflection. This approach views education as encounter, learning as a journey, and sees value in placing emphasis on embodied experience of learning and knowing. A Meditative Inquiry frame is adopted in this paper to combine autoethnography and journaling to present a contemplative reflective self-study of the author's academic language and learning (ALL) practice. The author's background as a member of a contemplative practice community, in this case a Steiner or Waldorf School community, is examined, in addition to thematic analysis of journal entries collected over 18 months. Themes identified include working with a wider sense of the person, bringing heart, being present, the notion of living thinking and language and the indirect 'imparting' that occurs within Individual consultations practice. A braided narrative allows switching between memories, journal entries and point of writing reflections. The contribution lies in the innovative approach to reflection modelled and the bringing of contemplative studies perspectives to bear on ALL practice. Themes presented are offered as potential departure points for ways of thinking through ALL practice, rather than definitive insights or conclusions.

Key Words: Reflective practice, Contemplative Studies, Meditative Inquiry, Individual Consultations, Steiner education.

1. Introduction

Reflective practice is considered a key activity for those wishing to develop professional skills in the contemporary workplace. While Dewy's observation that "we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience" was made over a century ago, understanding and applications of reflection have been extensively developed through scholarship of the past several decades. Well recognised has been the work of Schön (1987; 1995) who distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action for example and emphasised the inclusion of tacit knowledge in decision making. Within education contexts, Brookfield (1995) highlighted the importance of identifying assumptions in reflection, including what he termed, paradigmatic, prescriptive and causal assumptions. He also identified four lenses for reflection for educators, namely autobiography, the student's eyes, colleagues' perceptions and literature. More recently David Boud has emphasised the role of emotion in reflection, as well as noting the importance in contemporary workplaces of *practice* and group or team contexts for reflection (Boud et al., 2006;

Boud, 2010). Perhaps the newest reflective approach, however, is what Zeichner and Liston (2014) have termed the "contemplative-spiritual perspective". This approach draws on understandings from the emerging field of contemplative studies and involves a focus on what Zeichner and Liston (2014, p. 52) describe as the "soul enriching material that guides us through life". While contemplative approaches are already being treated as synonymous with reflective approaches in some contemporary resources, such as in Harvey et al.'s (2020), *Reflection for learning: A scholarly practice guide for educators*, the contemplative reflective approach is still finding it's footing in contemporary educational practice. This is partly because the field of contemplative studies is still itself an emerging one.

David Roth proposed the field of contemplative studies in 2006. Outlining a new course of study at Brown University, Roth (2006) proposed that in the context of teaching and learning in higher education, the new field would "foster a deeper knowledge of the nature of our existence as human beings in a world that is intricately interrelated on many levels" (p. 1787). He pointed out that "contemplative practices abound in societies around the world … and … are an important part of the very fabric from which people build meaningful lives" (p. 1787), but also that, as an increasing number of scholars were beginning to point out, contemporary science was dominated by a third-person focus enabling a mastery of technology, but that was significantly limited in facilitating understanding of our inner worlds. "We have become the masters of third-person scientific investigation", he suggested, "but we are mere novices in the arts of critical first-person scientific investigation" (p. 1787). In providing an account of contemplative studies, Komjathy (2018) has described the field as "an emerging interdisciplinary field dedicated to research and education on contemplative practice and contemplative experience, including the possible relevance and application to a wide variety of undertakings" (p. 1). Contemplative approaches are connected with practices, such as mindfulness and Yoga for example, but also with knowledge traditions, sometimes referred to as "wisdom traditions". East Asian traditions are perhaps the most widely recognised among these, but they also include Greco-Roman and Western Philosophy, Aboriginal and Native American traditions, American Transcendentalism, and Anthroposophy (Ergas, 2019, p. 253). Ergas (2019) has identified a contemplative turn in education that has introduced not only shifts in practices, but "shifts in the epistemology undergirding curricular-pedagogical practice" (p. 252). That is, shifts not only in ways of doing, but in ways of knowing.

Definitions of contemplative studies have tended to emphasise either the enhancement of deeper meaning and fuller experiences of life that are afforded, or the behavioural and mental training that results in alterations in regulation of cognitive or emotional processes or capacities such as attention and focus (Ergas, 2019). In describing how Higher Education teachers have been taking up these approaches in classes with students, a pioneer in the contemplative studies field, Arthur Zajonc (2014) has suggested that a "quiet revolution" has been taking place. Led by these teachers, students at universities around the world, he suggests, have been

> settling their bodies, stilling their minds, calming their emotions, and schooling their attentions by means of contemplative practices. Insight and compassion practices complement those designed to strengthen attention and emotional balance so that complexity can be sustained until the epiphany we experience as direct and deep apprehension occurs. (p. 205)

In considering the benefits of taking up a contemplative reflective lens to consider my own academic language and learning (ALL) practice, two events represented formative seeds. The first occurred in 2022 when I (virtually) attended the *18th Summer Session on Contemplative Practices in Education*, hosted by the Association for the Contemplative Mind in Higher Education, which Arthur Zajonc had founded in 2008. My aim was to explore how contemplative pedagogies and approaches might inform my ALL practice. During one of the sessions, the facilitator posed the question: "What does justice feel like?" It was not a rhetorical question: we were invited to note down our answers and share our responses. After so long honing my ability to define concepts in a formal intellectual manner, being asked to describe what a concept might "feel like" in my body

caught me off guard. It probably shouldn't have, because it was not my first encounter with approaches that take a contemplative perspective. In addition to being an ALL practitioner, I have both scholarly and personal experience in, and as part of, what I can now describe as a contemplative knowledge community. As a student, I attended a Steiner school, also known as a Waldorf school. For my doctorate, I examined the history of Steiner education in Australia. It is not insignificant in light of this to note that Arthur Zajonc, a well-recognised figure in the contemplative studies movement, was the founder of a Waldorf school in the USA, and General Secretary of the Anthroposophical Society in America (1994–2002) and attributes to Anthroposophy many of the insights applied in his contributions to contemplative practice in Higher Education.

The contemplative understandings that underpin Steiner education are drawn from Anthroposophy, the body of knowledge articulated by Austrian philosopher and social theorist Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925). The communities that surround these schools – of which there are currently approximately sixty in Australia, and approximately around 1100 in 72 countries globally (Waldorf World List, 2024) – generally reflect engagement with contemplative practices and approaches, as informed by anthroposophy, woven through their personal and professional lives. The Steiner schools I attended as a primary and secondary school student had buildings designed according to Anthroposophical principles, for example. They also featured nearby Steiner teacher training centres, Anthroposophical medical centres, and organic and biodynamic fruit shops and bakeries. While the biodynamic approach to agriculture and the Steiner educational approach are the most well-known applications of Steiner's ideas, the pragmatic nature of many of Steiner's ideas has made them applicable in a variety of fields including medicine, finance, art, and architecture. Within a typical Steiner school community, the contemplative discourse is not restricted to educational concerns and contexts. Rather, it tends to be enmeshed in the wider community. If I were to pick two fundamental features of this orientation it would be: (1) interiority, or taking the interior life seriously, most notably through meditative practices (Boland, 2024), and (2) adopting (or attempting to) a living language of things that mirrors living processes, and by extension (tries to) avoid representationalist, or static, conceptions of knowledge (Dahlin, 2013). Both these interests are now evident within the broader educational sphere in theoretical dimensions. A focus on practices is evident through the uptake of practice theory in education for example, with emphases on the dynamic and context bound nature of practice (Boud, 2010; Kemmis, 2022; Schatzki et al., 2001). It can also be seen in the socio-materialist perspective outlined by Barad (2003), which emphasises the performative nature of knowledge activity. This view holds that knowledge and reality are co-constructed and shifts the focus from conceiving representations as serving an intermediary role between the knower and the known to the material practices and processes that produce the phenomena.

This leads me to the second formative seed for this paper. A few years ago, a student mentioned to me that she had completed a Steiner teacher education qualification. I explained that I had gone through a Steiner school, and had recently completed a PhD looking at Steiner education history, but that I hadn't actually formally studied Steiner pedagogy and that I now found myself wondering to what extent I was equipped to apply these approaches in my own ALL practice. She responded to the effect that, "you already bring that to your work, because you came through and were formed by that community". Having not previously thought of my practice in this way, this comment led me to consider how orientations and ideas inherent in these approaches – under the banner of contemplative pedagogies and understandings – might appear in my work. The account of practice presented in this paper draws on autoethnographic instantiations of life experience, along with an analysis of reflective journal entries collected over 18 months.

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to clarify this study does not present an evaluative account of contemplative practices that I overtly apply in my individual consultations with students, such as breathing exercises for example. Nor does it set out to provide a road map, framework, or set of guidelines or distilled principles intended for other ALL practitioners to draw on. If these occur, they are incidental. Rather, the aim is to share an exploration of how my background experience

within a non-traditional contemplative knowledge community has brought a potential deepening to my ALL practice. While any benefits, such as calmness are much welcomed, my primary interest here aligns more with the definition of contemplative studies as concerned with enhancing and deepening experiences of learning and educational encounter, with a focus on meaningful experiences of life as a value and aim in itself. The notion of reflection, Boud (2010) reminds us, "aims to generate possibilities that can be appropriated, not to project manage a solution" (p. 33). For readers interested in contemplative approaches, the hope is that this paper presents some starting points for thinking about these perspectives, or even thinking through ALL practice with the aid of them. The value for others may lie more with the model of reflection presented, and the possibilities it suggests for alternative forms of reflection that might usefully capture practitioner perspectives and backgrounds.

The study is also part of a larger researcher-practitioner project focused on the role of Individual Consultations (ICs) in ALL practice seeking to extend the understanding of ICs as an educational form with a specific history and context within the Australian tertiary education landscape (Chanock, 2007; Barthel et al., 2021; Campitelli et al., 2019). The larger project placed an emphasis on the ICs practice, in contrast to measurement or evaluation, although this was also valued. Ethics clearance was obtained through the Human Research Ethics Committee at my institution. Meditative Inquiry, as articulated by Ashwani Kumar (2013; 2022), was adopted as an overall frame for the study presented here, enabling engagement with contemplative concepts largely on their own terms. A Braided Narrative (Tracy, 2019) approach is applied to accommodate weaving between reflective journal entries, autoethnographic reflections, and "at point of writing" reflections, presented in the form of vignettes.

2. Background: tracing my journey with contemplative approaches

The family story goes that when camping one year, my sister and I still pre-school age, my mother noticed a group of children playing. She felt they were playing in a particularly healthy way. She approached the parents and was informed these children attended the local Vrijeschool (Free School), as Steiner schools are known in the Netherlands. I subsequently attended Steiner schools in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Australia. I also spent three months in Switzerland, at the Goetheanum, at the age of about seven, while my mother studied a course in Anthroposophical medicine. As noted above, Steiner education is underpinned by Anthroposophy, the body of knowledge outlined by Austrian philosopher and social theorist Rudolf Steiner. Anthroposophy sits within a Western esoteric, contemplative knowledge tradition that has until recently been systematically sidelined within the academy (Hanegraaf, 2012; Rawson, 2021). To explain my experience, it is important to note that Rudolf Steiner saw inner life development as important, but freedom as more so. In line with this view, his intention for Steiner schools, the first of which was opened in Stuttgart in 1919, was not "to train a student's spiritual vision … [but rather to not] damage what already existed" (Sagarin, 2011, p. 163). As a result, Steiner school students are not taught esoteric concepts, or – with the exception of a traditional morning and afternoon 'verse' – any type of meditative practices. Students are usually aware, however, that among the core group of teachers a common sensibility exists (Bak, 2021) which can be seen to represent a form of big D, Discourse, defined by Gee (2014, p. 25) as language in combination with other social practices, reflecting behaviours, ways of thinking, values and perspectives in social groups.

Part of the "hidden curriculum" at the (Steiner) schools I attended, it seems to me in retrospect, was a value placed on an insightful or thoughtful observation, and even a capacity for meaningful silence. Where these translated into impressive academic grades (as they often did), this was appreciated, but I can't recall such results being valorised above the former. Tom Stehlik (2004) has conducted a study of the community surrounding Mt Barker Waldorf School, a prominent Steiner school in South Australia, as a vibrant site of adult learning, and notes the way in which formal and informal learning takes place in such a site as a community of practice. It was from a community like this that I picked up orientations reflected in expressions such as "working with'.

Steiner educators, more than other people I have met, tend to speak in terms of "working with" whatever is happening for the children, or a class, at a particular time. Instead of definitions, Steiner encouraged "narrative and descriptive approaches [to] be employed in teaching" (Dahlin, 2013, p. 80). The approach also encourages a focus on life processes such as breathing, nourishing, sleeping. At the same time, I was aware that meditation was not viewed as a mechanism for calming the mind as much as it was for becoming continually more *aware*.

Despite growing up in a community like this, I was not myself drawn to engage with the contemplative or esoteric understandings to any great extent in the years following graduation from high school. I was curious where this all fitted, however, and undertook an undergraduate degree majoring in the History and Philosophy of Science (HPS), and subsequently completed a Masters thesis examining the history of homeopathy as an alternative medical tradition in nineteenth century New South Wales. Quite some time later, while working as an ALL practitioner, the opportunity arose to embark on a PhD in which I examined the history of Steiner education in Australia. According to most of the forty Steiner educators I interviewed, it was the *inner life* dimension of their practice that was the most difficult to convey to outsiders. It was also this dimension of their educational practice that defined their work as Steiner educationalists. Without inner life work, they felt, the difference between Steiner and other educational approaches (alternative or mainstream) was minimal and the curriculum reduced to a mere "list of activities". A concern with inner experiences, even simply what the atmosphere of a certain place or space or encounter is for example, and how concepts (like "justice") might feel as an embodied experience, is common to contemplative perspectives and is reflected in the associated language and ideas of this new field. For readers not familiar with Steiner education in terms of approaches or outcomes, studies suggest that graduates display a love for learning, strong creativity, critical thinking and social responsibility (Carey & Haralambous, 2024).

3. Methodology

The following section outlines the broad frame along with the specifics of how this study was conducted and conceived. In keeping with the reflective nature of the paper, some relevant memories or reflections are incorporated into this section where deemed relevant for highlighting the connections in regards to the non-traditional methods presented. This aligns also with the braided narrative approach used. Braided Narrative is borrowed from literary studies, and sometimes used in sociological studies to allow for disparate voices and timelines while maintaining an overall narrative arc (Tracy, 2019). It is used here to accommodate the recursive interplay between the autoethnographic elements, the journal reflections, analysis of those reflections, and thinking that occurred in the writing up process. Given the premise of examining how something is showing up in my IC practice for which I have a limited formal knowledge base, there is a tension throughout this paper between seeking to elucidate the concepts and ideas touched on and simply identifying and embarking on an exploration of them. While the paper strives to build up a coherent picture, that picture is not intended either as an argument for the benefits of a contemplative approach directly, nor to outline and collate specific insights into such practices. The aim rather is to "gloss" a range of often inter-related ideas and concepts, with reference to either autoethnographic experiences, reflective journal entries, or the considerations of these together. This approach is consistent with Boud's aforementioned characterisation of reflection being useful for producing things that might be considered to be taken up rather than the generation of definitive answers. The eclectic nature of this endeavour is reflected in some of the structuring, including some unevenness in section length and occasional overlap in themes and discussion points.

3.1. Meditative Inquiry

Ashwani Kumar (2022) describes Meditative Inquiry as "an art of becoming aware" (p. xix). He outlines four perspectives on "awareness" in education: (1) information, (2) criticism, (3) reflection and (4) meditation (Kumar, 2013). The first perspective is related to information

transmission, the second focuses on systems and contexts for education, and the third on practitioner or researcher *self-reflexivity*. The fourth takes a further step, he suggests, of turning the focus of consciousness' attention onto itself. This step, he suggests, points to "a deeper consideration of the nature of human consciousness and its complexity as well as the possibilities of its profound transformation". In introducing this distinction, he quotes from Krishnamurti:

> Is there an idea of awareness or is one aware? There is a difference. The idea of being aware, or being aware? "Aware" means to be sensitive, to be alive, to the things about one, to nature, to people, to colour, to the trees, to the environment, to the social structure … to be aware of all that is happening outwardly and to be aware of what is happening inside psychologically. ([1979], 2005, cited in Kumar, 2013, pp. 8-9)

Meditative Inquiry, Kumar explains, is an existential entry into one's "innermost recesses". It is an approach to self-awareness that is existential. It involves not just trying to identify how one felt in a particular moment when reflecting on it but also turning to the place where the phenomenon of "being aware" is situated, inwardly. In my own attempts to do so, this has usually led to a sense of enlargement or heightened alertness: a sense of thickening and increased textuality, or widening, of my sense of reality. Often these moments are fleeting and disappear or prove elusive under the gaze of ordinary attention (Boland, 2024). Kumar (2013) suggests that "the significant thing in meditation is not the analysis of the unconscious but its existential release that unburdens the mind of the psychological accumulations" (p. 11).

Of relevance to this paper is the extent to which the distinction in the first sentence of the Krishnamurti quote between the idea of awareness and awareness as a phenomenon of consciousness itself is familiar to me, as it presumably is for anyone who has spent time cultivating an inner life practice or in communities that encourage and respect the processes of doing so. It is this sort of meditative attention that Steiner teachers are encouraged to deploy in bringing each child in their class into their conscious mind, in a loving way, each evening, as part of their pedagogical practice (Steiner, 1996). This activity is seen by Steiner teachers as equal in importance to anything else they may do in the classroom on any given day. For me, this notion is utterly familiar, and can be seen in this account from 1922 from a teacher at the first Steiner school, established in Stuttgart, in 1919:

> What a difference for me to be able to go within before an exercise class and then stand in front of the children not as myself with some fabrications or tricks but as a being, I would like to say unknown to myself, whose powers are part of the spiritual stream of the world and who can receive all that comes from above and from the children – or when I cannot go within beforehand! That is a totally different class. (Von Bothmer, 1997, p. 22)

In addition to interiority, Meditative Inquiry also places emphasis on questions. As Haberlin, referencing Kabat-Zinn has observed, in a contemplative inquiry context, "inquiry" doesn't necessarily mean looking for answers, particularly quick answers, but rather sitting with the questions (Haberlin, 2024, p. 1977). Consequently, throughout the paper there are occasions when treatment of a topic is limited to the simple raising of a question. In keeping with this orientation also, the paper sometimes adopts a more informal, conversational, tone than would usually be commensurate with a more traditional research paper.

3.2. Autoethnography

In autoethnography, researchers "intentionally embrace personal memory, self-observation, self-reflection, and self-analysis as a means to collect autobiographic data" (Chang, 2013, p. 15). Understood not just as a way of representing knowledge but as a form of inquiry, autoethnography can lead to "evocative tales that encourage dialogue" (Tracy, 2019, p. 69). Focus can be on remembered moments, images, feelings, and can include "epiphanies" or times and experiences that swayed or impacted the trajectory of a person's life (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 275). Heewon Chang

(2013) has argued that it is an approach suitable for those in higher education wishing to explore the "relationship between their spirituality and professional practices" (p. 24). Given autoethnography is ultimately a historical method, this paper takes seriously the historically constituted nature of the ideas being discussed, including the biographical lineages that either bring me to discussion of them, or that have brought them into the sphere of this discussion. In this I pick up Remy Low's (2022) notion of "travelling pedagogy" in acknowledging how "the ethico-political significance" of contemplative practice "cannot be considered apart from its time and place" (Low, 2022, p. 155). Contemplative practice in one context is not necessarily equivalent to the same or similar practice in another context, in other words, and it is useful to note that there is a strong strand within the movement for contemplative approaches in higher education that understand these approaches as a form of resistance to perceived pressures and trends common to work in contemporary university environments (Chatman et al., 2025).

3.3. Data and Analysis

For the purposes of this study, reflective journal entries were collected over a period of 18 months. Guiding parameters for reflections were that they related to IC practice and contemplative practices or perspectives. I (loosely) restricted my data collection to occur whilst cycling to work, stopping to take brief notes, only when a relevant thought, that felt like in an insight of some type, occurred. Entries were typically short, and in a type of note-form. Thematic analysis was undertaken following Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach. Braun and Clarke (2019) have emphasised that:

> for us, qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth' that is either 'out there' and findable from, or buried deep within, the data. (p. 591)

My approach to the data was to look for dominant or recurring topics, but also to seek to find connections or apparent natural groupings between entries. Judgments in relation to this were informed by and overlain with autoethnographic considerations. The final themes intentionally retain a looseness of formulation, and element of overlap, in keeping with the broader aims of this study. What the study did not set out to do was capture detailed accounts of my practice that could then be examined for telling consistencies or isolated key principles. Instead, they were characterised by fleeting memories and elusive thoughts. This intentional looseness has been retained in the final formulation of the themes as reflective of the aim to explore in evocative terms what it might mean from a contemplative perspective to bring more of oneself to IC practice, in the attempt to meet (encounter) more of the students as whole "beings" interested and animated by authentic meaning in their lives. The themes are presented below, along with an explorative discussion of each that links to some potentially relevant concepts or related understandings drawn from either my background or relevant literature, or both.

4. Findings and discussion

In analysing my reflective practitioner journal entries, six themes emerged: (1) a wider sense of the person, (2) heart, (3) presence, (4) living thinking, (5) pointing to process, and (6) imparting.

4.1. A wider sense of the person (theme 1)

By far the most common motif in my journal entries were the notions of deepening and widening. There are many ways that these could be discussed and unpacked. The few ways I respond here are extremely limited and intended to gesture towards a few starting points only. I start with a typical journal entry on this topic, presented in full below.

> *Getting to / cutting through to a wider sense of the person, and all that it entails, is the greatest challenge in tertiary education today. What prospect*

> *that all the senses are brought to bear – that thinking is a capacity and capability in context. How do we widen this? [how do we enable a] wider sense of the person. How do we widen and broaden ourselves? [What is it that] shuts down the whole person? [In my practice, ideally,] I find myself nudging the systems towards allowing more of oneself through the door – students but also importantly staff.* (Journal entry, 27/3/2024).

There are many ways of interpreting this entry, but re-reading it put me in mind firstly of the senses. While the five senses are still considered primary in most settings, contemporary science has identified at least 20 (Dahlin, 2017). Nevertheless, the contemplative knowledge community I grew up in regularly referred to "working with" "the 12 senses" that were outlined by Rudolf Steiner. In addition to sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch, Steiner added a sense of warmth, balance and movement, along with what he termed a *life* sense, a *language* sense, a *thought* sense, and the *I*-sense (Steiner, 1921, July 22). The language sense facilitates understanding and awareness of word, speech and language used by others. The thought sense allows a person to perceive or comprehend the thoughts of another person, something which in itself requires thought. The life sense is directed towards the inner state of the body and its organs, and informs us "whether we are alert and energetic, or sleepy and worn out" (Dahlin, 2017, p. 68). The I-sense senses the presence of another person, not one's own "I" (Dahlin, 2017, p. 68).

In terms of responding to the students in front of us, it is not difficult to imagine some, if not all of these distinct senses being useful in some way in perceiving the students in front of us and responding to their need. In terms of my own application of them, until recently my familiarity with these concepts has been rudimentary. For the purposes of this paper, it suffices to say here that in my experience, efforts to tap even into the five commonly recognised senses more consciously can lead me to clearer, if not enlarged and widened, apprehensions and appreciations of the students who appear in front of me. This might be through an appreciation of the "taste" that a student exhibits, through the aesthetic style evident in their academic voice for example. While something like the sense of smell may not seem relevant in an online interaction, being at least connected to my own sense of smell can be grounding in ways that help me be clearer in my responses and attentiveness to the student.

The notion of "through the door" refenced in the journal entry is one I have felt on numerous occasions and is also expressed by Neil Boland (2024) in describing his life as an esotericist in the contemporary university environment. Boland confides that he repeatedly finds himself in situations where he is epistemologically and ontologically "the odd one out". On an everyday level, he manages this well and accepts that many professional friendships are simply such that only part of himself can be expressed. And yet, he notes:

> when I walk into a room, I leave part of myself at the door. This leaving part of myself at the door can become an unquestioned habit, even in situations where what I leave outside might have been welcomed. Experience has taught me that it is usually safer (perhaps I just mean easier) to leave that part of me unexpressed. Instead of persevering in trying to establish such connections among my immediate circles, I instead look for colleagueship more widely. (Boland, 2024, para. 48)

Conscious of this in my own professional life, without overstepping appropriate bounds in recent years, I have set out to bring more of myself through the door. Very occasionally, I will do so in ICs also, where an opening appears and a careful judgement is made that it is likely to help. Usually, it is done by pointing to a wider context for a struggle being experienced, or a thought that is being articulated. I may refer to my PhD study on Steiner education, or refer to the knowledge tradition I was brought up in to normalise the process of needing to adjust to the particularities of the dominant knowledge culture within a university. Or occasionally, I will

sympathise with perceptions of what appears to be lacking in the current system. Where I do so, I counterbalance this with my appreciation and enthusiasm for the academy overall.

4.2. Heart (theme 2)

Over the years, I have pondered the question of whether the contemporary university is capable of incorporating *heart* into its practice. In going through my journal entries, I was not surprised to see this question pop up.

> *Do we have / can the university have / does it lack a basis for a conversation about heart in education?* (Journal entry 22/5/224)

According to Boland (2024):

> an esoteric outlook primarily involves the heart. It is an opening of the heart, a forming of connection to what can be sensed inwardly. Its essential attribute is a calm(ed) and penetrated soul life. (para. 55)

What is meant by "heart" here refers to qualities such as warmth and open generosity, as opposed to the more intellectual concepts of "equity" and "fairness", important as these concepts are. My experience from how this distinction was (and is) talked about in the Steiner school knowledge community suggests the precise definition is less relevant here than the value placed on the healthy *integration* of the capacities of thinking, *feeling* and willing. Of course, the notion of educating the head, *heart* and hands is not unique to Steiner education.

For myself, "heart" means going into the next meeting with an open heart. In a literal sense: I bring my awareness to my chest area to check that there is a sense of openness there, and if I find there is not, unless there is a self-protective reason not to, I open it up. I do this semi-routinely, sometimes with focal awareness and sometimes with "subsidiary" awareness, to use Polanyi's (1983) terms. The same goes for ICs in my ALL practice. As noted in other papers in this collection, ALL practitioners, in my experience, tend to be inherently geared to wanting to help. They are sympathetic and empathetic. This takes *heart*. Indeed, my contention would be that one of the functions of ALL practitioners, at least in part, is to represent the *heart* of those institutions we find ourselves in. Of course, the privilege we have is to be *paid to help* – without needing to grade students work or design their core learning.

What capacity does the contemporary tertiary education institution have for heart, however, or for even holding serious conversations about it? After attending a recent leadership workshop at my institution where value alignments were spoken about, I left wondering whether it wasn't so much a value as a "heart-chakra" alignment that I was grappling with. Treating social justice as a (intellectual) concept alone is unlikely to be sufficient for its actual achievement, for example. Equally, righteous indignation at perceived injustice (leading to an anger/heart response) can invoke the dangers of self-indulgence, if not tempered by a capacity to think, and to act in a way that marries with both sensitivity and intelligence. Of course, the above statement is to be taken in context. Interestingly, for Steiner – and as an idea I somehow absorbed from early on – "willing" (agency) is the capacity that is most "asleep" or least accessible for human beings in the present age (Steiner, 1996). Partly this relates to much of what our bodies do, the metabolic system and breathing for example is either entirely or largely unconscious, but further also the notion that there is a type of activity that that there is a creative component to acts of will. But in another way, willing is simply less accessible. We can enter into feelings and thinking is something that illuminates, it has a character of clarity and definiteness, while action initiated by the will is immediate and direct. As Hoffman (2020) has put it,

> in one way [or] another[,] will has to do with the impulse to action which transforms and which creates; with the human will we always speak of *experience,* not reflection[,] objectivity and truth. The impulses of the will do not become apparent to us like thoughts or mental images – we ourselves carry them out. (p. 57).

In ALL practice, this "impulse to action" can be related both to questions of motivation and agency for our students, and ourselves, and also the ability for both of creative critical expression – or in other words, to questions of voice.

> Vignette 1:
>
> Some years ago, I had the privilege of attending the launch of a report on a project extending the offering of education to incarcerated youth in Victoria. As part of the launch of the report, Indigenous artist Archie Roach played some songs. In talking about his work with imprisoned youth, and introducing his song, "We Won't Cry", he made the observation: "the youth look not only to the *wisdom* of their elders, but to the *love* of their elders". It was something that stuck with me, and has often made me wonder what might this look like in a Higher Education setting, and is the contemporary university up to it?

Among the many scholars who have attempted to outline what a university with heart at its centre might look like, Nigel Hoffmann's (2020), *The university at the threshold: orientation through Goethean science*, outlines and situates an approach consistent with a contemplative philosophy, and particularly the work of Steiner, who extends Goethe's approach, that foregrounds care. Hoffman argues that "no matter how things are twisted or stretched, it is simply not possible to relate the methodology of conventional objective science in itself to the notion of care" (p. 8). He does not suggest that the *fruits* of this science cannot do so, but is making a point about the dispassionate search for knowledge that underpins this contemporary approach. By contrast, he suggests, Goethean science in its techniques and "the whole way it seeks to it seeks to engage with phenomena of nature and human society, is an expression of care" (p. 8). By this he means, that "care gives us the incentive to extend and deepen our understanding because it wishes for things to appear most fully what they are and potentially can be". Hoffman contrasts "care" with "concern" (p. 8). Science, he suggests, is "motivated by concern in the sense of interest and responsibility for the truth" (p. 8). There is no space to go into further depth here, suffice to say there is a tradition and a lineage of understanding and practice that present a thread of continuity in regards to such approaches that are being picked up anew, and extended, in the new field of contemplative studies. The understandings and perspectives from this field may have answers to many of the challenges – fostering student belonging, health and wellbeing of staff and students, and the promotion of deep learning for example – that universities are faced with. Palmer and Zajonc's (2010), *The Heart of Higher Education: a call to renewal*, likewise places heart at the centre in its call for an essential dimension of higher education to include the cultivation of our full humanity, arguing that integral and transformative approaches to learning are needed to better meet the needs of both students and the communities and societies universities ultimately serve.

4.3. Presence (theme 3)

In conversation with an ALL colleague some time ago, I mentioned sometimes finding that I don't have to do much at all in ICs. The student begins expressing what they need to do, or what they are stuck with, and before I can intervene, they simply begin supplying the answers themselves. My colleague pointed out in response that part of our work is to help students be present to their work. This struck me as a deceptively simple, insightful observation. I was not surprised, therefore, at the idea of *presence* appearing in my journal notes.

> *We help students be present with their work. For that we need to be present too. What does this mean? What could it mean?* (Journal entry 24/05/2024).

Rather than attempt to answer these questions directly, my discussion is limited to pointing to the contemplative domains of understanding and practice where answers may be found. The notion of being present, or "in the moment" is widely recognised, and is familiar to anyone who has engaged in mindfulness practice of any kind. Being present is a central faculty of consciousness. As McCaw (2019) has noted, "at the heart of contemplation is an attentiveness towards the present moment" (p. 1). Subtly different from a capacity for concentration, in the moment awareness has

become increasingly recognised in areas such as music – including improvisational jazz (Sarath, 2016) – and athletic performance (Birrer, 2012), along with areas such as organisational development and leadership. Perhaps the best known theoretical concept is the state of flow as outlined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) as part of the positive psychology movement. A lesser known but nevertheless influential contribution is Otto Scharmer's notion of "presencing", and "working from the future". Intrigued by the way effective people often appear drawn forward by a sense of potentiality in an emerging future, Scharmer coined the term "presencing" as a blend of the words "present" and "sensing" to describe this phenomenon. Presencing, he states, "means to sense, tune in, and act from one's highest future potential – the future that depends on us to bring it into being" (Scharmer, 2016, pp. 7-8).

In what Scharmer (2016) termed Theory U, five moments in this process are identified: (1) co-initiating; (2) co-sensing; (3) co-presencing; (4) co-creating; and (5) co-evolving. These are depicted on a U diagram, to convey their movement as a process. These five movements involve: (1) listening to what life calls you to do; (2) observing and listening "with your mind and heart wide open"; (3) going to a place of stillness to seek deeper sources of knowing; (4) the protyping of living microcosms by doing; and (5) innovating larger ecosystems to hold spaces and connect people across boundaries. Founding chair of the Presencing Institute, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which runs a U-lab, Scharmer explains that the inspiration for his approach came directly from his experience growing up on a farm run by his parents as pioneering biodynamic farmers near Hamburg in Germany. His father taught him to appreciate that the "living quality of the soil is the most important thing in organic agriculture" (Scharmer, 2016, p. 8), and that there were two components, the visible – above the surface – and the mostly invisible – below the surface. The quality of the yield depends mostly on what is below the surface.

Translating this theory to the social field, Scharmer (2016) describes an organisation's topsoil as existing where the "the visible and invisible dimensions of the social field – meet, connect, and intertwine". Scharmer's schema refers to thinking, feeling and willing directly, while observation of the "living quality", as with social organisms, draws from the phenomenology of Goethean science, sometimes described as "delicate empiricism" (Robins, 2006). This sensitivity to the "living quality" of things is something I bring to bear in what I attempt to attune to in IC work. Sometimes I do this unconsciously, sometimes semi-consciously, and occasionally consciously. For me the possibility of such distinction – a sort of continual background scanning – is always there in some form or other, including in ICs.

In an attempt to illustrate these ideas, consider the following exercise. With eyes closed, imagine a spring day, with a clear fresh breeze blowing and a gentle warmth from the sun caressing one's skin. You are looking at a spring blossom of some kind. Notice its delicate features, minute detail, fragility of the blossom leaves, the colour, texture, and so on. Now follow this by picturing a mobile phone that you are holding, and enter into the feeling of it as a device, what type of energy does it have. What is the nature of its complexity – does living "life force" emanate from it, or does it have a certain "dead-ness" to it? Such distinctions may seem fanciful and unimportant. But if we want a living education, don't we need to hone our sense of what a life force feels like? (In the same way that we should all have a ready sense of what justice feels like?). While this thought experiment or imaginative exercise may not appear to be related to IC practice directly, the possibility it contains is to become aware of where the (productive or generative) energy is within the interaction during the course of an individual consultation. As mentioned earlier, the intent here is not for me to isolate particular instances from my own practice, but rather to gloss the potential of cultivating sensitivities along these lines within one's own IC practice. Of course, since each student is an individual and each IC session circumstance different, one never knows what one will feel, or even how relevant it may be. As Boland (2024) notes, "you begin every meditative session not knowing what will happen or if anything will happen at all" (para. 35). While it might be imagined that this type of perspective or conscious approach may be helpful in enabling students to see academic assignments as helping develop intellectual and developmental

skills, I as often find myself steering students away from an idealised larger picture and toward taking seriously the more instrumental requirements of the task.

4.4. Can we help them with thinking? (theme 4)

As Dahlin (2009) has stated "thinking is an important educational activity" (p. 537).

In one of my journal entries I raised the question:

> *Are we able to help them with thinking? Is that part of our pedagogy? Where is this captured …?* (Journal entry 22/05/2024).

This question was written following an account of an IC that day wherein the student was experiencing difficulty seeing where his critical analysis, as required by the task criteria, could fit, particularly since the student largely *agreed* with what was presented in the prescribed central text:

> *we talked around and through and across till finally after 25 mins it became clear all he needed to do was occasionally [add in something like] as X (prescribed author) has argued/contended/pointed out …'. This subtly but definitely placed him in the text, whilst still deferring/agreeing with [it]. Indicating [the student's] stance. This was satisfying and he seemed to really get it. [It] felt like it was a bit of an inspired moment, but I think we couldn't have got there without the explorative thinking through first.*

At my institution, "helping them with their thinking" is not on the drop-downlist when we log a record of our ICs, although it is arguably implied in options such as "planning an assignment" or "structuring academic writing". And there is of course nothing stopping us from putting it in the notes, but I find myself not doing so because my instinct is: (1) as a category it is too vague to really "count", and (2) it may be misinterpreted as providing content tutoring.

Accepting for a moment that "helping them with their thinking" plays a valuable role in responding to what students need and is something ALL practitioners can assist with, and therefore forms a legitimate part of IC pedagogy and curriculum – the question arises what a contemplative approach or lens might offer to assist with this help. In addition to calming exercises that can help moderate the feelings of anxiety that can hinder thinking, contemplative approaches can offer potentially useful perspectives on the nature of thinking itself. Not least through the notion of *living* thinking.

In an article entitled, *On the Path Towards Thinking: Learning from Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Steiner*, education scholar Bo Dahlin (2009) examines some of the ideas about the nature of thinking that are drawn on in Steiner schools to foster "the development of living, creative thinking" (p. 537). Dahlin notes that for Steiner, there is an important distinction between thought and thinking, and there is a tendency, he suggests, for people in everyday awareness to focus on their thoughts, rather than the activity itself. For Steiner, Dahlin (2009) suggests,

> genuine thinking is alive; it is an intense spiritual activity. It uses concepts and ideas not in static forms, but as dynamic possibilities. At the same time, it is clear and precise. A concept according to Steiner is a particular potentiality of what may be called noetic movements. (p. 542).

This conception stands in contrast to materialistic explanations of thinking as caused by the brain. In the same way that Ashwani Kumar's Meditative Inquiry takes a step beyond reflection and reflexivity to a place of stillness and silence beyond it, Dahlin (2009) suggests that Steiner takes a step beyond Heidegger's conception of thinking by

> emphasizing the fact that in the everyday state of consciousness there is usually no awareness of our thinking activity; we are only aware of its results, which are the thoughts that it produces. We know what we think (more or less), but not how. In everyday life, we are not conscious of the mental activity

> as such, which gives rise to the thoughts we have. Yet it is precisely the transition from one thought to another that is accomplished by means of thinking as activity. Any particular thought is only a product or result of this activity; it is no longer active thinking, but a finished thought. (p. 543)

Steiner sets out ways to become more alert to the activity of thinking, as a way of tapping into the activity of thinking itself. Cultivating this awareness, he suggests, in itself leads to an "enlarged" sense of what is possible with thinking. Dahlin (2009), following Steiner, suggests that "contemplative practice is a way to learn to think, that is, to learn to live consciously in the activity of thinking, not only in thoughts" and further that "this leads to openness to 'Being'" (p. 551).

In the community in which I grew up – much like Otto Scharmer and countless others – notions such as *living more consciously in one's thinking* were woven into common discourse. Even if not mentioned directly, the shared understanding of it as possibility, and desirability, was always there. Whereas metacognition, as recognised within educational psychology, encourages learners to note their patterns of thinking (Dimmitt & McCormick, 2012), the notion of living more consciously in one's thinking involves not just taking what you are thinking, but cultivating awareness of the point of consciousness from which the thinking arises. It is this distinction that Kumar (2022) refers to when suggesting meditative inquiry takes a step beyond reflection, as mentioned earlier. And it is the recognition of this distinction that scholars such as Boland report making them feel outsiders within the doors of the contemporary academy. It is also this distinction that the field of contemplative studies sees itself, among other things, as bringing back into the academic knowledge equation. In my own IC practice, this shows up in my regular noticing of the thoughts I am having. One of the pleasures of ALL practice is that each student is different, and each session is different, and one never knows what will occur. For me this includes the anticipation prior to an IC of: *what thoughts am I going to have? What will the student spark in my own thinking? What will I find myself saying, and what insights will be provided to me by it?* One of the ways ICs form a privileged space (Tassinari, 2016) is what we find ourselves learning, by a grace or gift, from the students we see. Sometimes you will steer a student to an insight with purpose, but sometimes you find yourself articulating something that only in that moment you realise you knew, and had the capacity to say or bring clarity to. This type of experience falls under the, "so that complexity can be sustained until the epiphany we experience as direct and deep apprehension occurs" portion of Arthur Zajonc's quote presented in the opening paragraph of this paper.

Very occasionally, a student will articulate an appreciation of the "alchemy" of the process alluded to above – to invoke Eileen Hanrahan's artistic characterisation of the transformational states that can occur in ICs (Fraser, et al., 2023, p. 88). To date, my favourite example of this recursive alchemy is when an English as an Additional Language (EAL) background student informed me that she appreciated our IC sessions because: "you sparkle my thinking". Clearly meaning "spark", it was nevertheless a wonderfully aesthetic visual twist that captured more directly the "living quality" of the thinking that was occurring in our sessions. I don't rely on some sort of transformational alchemy to happen of course, but I try (either through focal or subsidiary focus) to be constantly open to it.

4.5. Pointing to process (theme 5)

Perhaps the most pragmatic of themes evident in my journal entries was the extent to which I find myself pointing to process in my IC practice. While this occurs across the board, as will be discussed further below, on this occasion I clearly had in mind the work I do with research education students. At risk of revealing the often ad hoc, stream of consciousness nature of some of my entries, I provide the full entry here in original sketchy form, in hope it conveys some of the "conscious [potentially noetic] movement" inherent in my thinking in this moment.

> *Part of what I do is give space to acknowledge the process of research writing. The human side of that process. The craft side.*

> *The more that is tended to, the less these researchers will tend towards just punching out research work. The best research work has that additional quality.*
>
> *An additional quality.*
>
> *(Next step from being present).*
>
> *That what we do is experienced at an elevated level. All practice has this in infinite gradations and portions. So this is what matters. But the human side of it.*
>
> *Astral, etheric. Ego. Spirit.*
>
> *Go back to Steiner's musical note after death. Each experience is unique. And matters. The universe is not complete without it. Proceed with that how you will.*
>
> *One small thing that is real matters above countless mechanical acts that are mindless.*
>
> *The word "matters" – is material.*
>
> *Is a practice and process. So the question is: how am I going to do it today?*
>
> *Sometimes it's just thinking a thought with a bit more clarity*
>
> (journal entry, 18/04/2023).

Etheric, astral, ego and spirit are part of Steiner's anthropology of the "four-fold" human being that comprises: (1) the physical body, (2) an etheric body – i.e. the formative energies that a living physical body together, (3) the astral body, which refers to the field of psychic forces such as desire, imaginations, thoughts and so on that a human being experiences, and (4) the "I" or ego which is understood in this schema as a purely spiritual power (Dahlin, 2017).

The point here is not to tease out how these ideas may or may not relate or overlap with contemporary understandings in philosophy, psychology or brain science (for this, see Dahlin, 2017, pp. 57-81), but more to note in an autoethnographic context, the community of practice within which I grew up and have spent time, in which these contemplative or esoteric conceptions or distinctions form part of the fabric of understanding and relating to the world.

To reiterate, esoteric concepts such as these distinctions are not taught to students at Steiner schools. Most Steiner school communities will have a core of teachers and staff dedicated to studying the esoteric body of knowledge, articulated by Rudolf Steiner, however, and such concepts are interwoven into the broader community of practice that such sites usually represent. As an ALL practitioner, I bring these distinctions to bear as a background consideration, as a potential additional lens, to perceive the student through, to (potentially) gain a wider picture.

In regards to mention above of "the note after death", I read somewhere once that Steiner had described the experience after death of returning to the spiritual note as involving a realisation that each individual person represents a unique note, and this is accompanied by the realisation that without this note the (song of) the universe would be incomplete. I have not found this notion again, and am not sure whether it was a misattribution, but the image and idea stuck with me. It is of course in a sense an obvious truism that every single bit of the universe is what makes up the universe, and as such each bit is a part of it, just by existing. I was inclined to edit the thought out here, but somehow the poetic whole of the entry, as a movement of thought, would seem incomplete without it.

As to process, by this I mean the emphases on drafting and grappling with ideas and structure that academic writers often go through, and the crises of confidence along the way that are experienced, before presenting coherent and neatly polished work. Observations such as, "most academic writers do a lot of their best thinking while writing", have been helpful and I pass them on. Kamler and Thompson (2010) make this point in their article titled: *It's been said before and we'll*

say it again – research is writing. Through highlighting that most academics view academic writing as a craft that involves a set of skills to be (constantly) "honed", I seek to bring into the frame for the student what it *feels* like to do academic work as a process. In doing so, I impart a "living picture" of the nature of what they are undertaking and – by extension – becoming a part of (i.e. a disciplinary knowledge community). It gives students a place where they fit, which can itself be an affirming act. It also subtly steers them away from static (representational/"dead") notions of what this might entail. Cultivation of a careful discernment in when and how to do this – or as Rob McCormack (2014) (drawing on Gadamar) has put it, "our 'tact' and judgement, our practical wisdom (*phronesis*)", is a continual process, hopefully contributing to an ever better, "'feel' or wisdom honed by hermeneutic conversations with students around the intellectual [and pragmatic] challenges facing them" (p. A58).

4.6. Imparting (theme 6)

The last theme comes from a journal entry made some time after listening to Dhangatti and Gumbayngirr man, Dr Ray Kelly Snr, Chair of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, talking about language. In a podcast interview with Richard Fidler (2024) in which he reflected on the creativity inherent in language and translation from Indigenous languages, he also shared how he approaches sharing Indigenous language with his grandchildren by using a word in context, eliciting a to-and-fro response: "I try and do it that way, I try to make it a living language without trying to say 'I'm trying to teach you something, I'm just imparting something to you'". This reminded me of a Steiner educator participant in my PhD study who said of the orientation and ideas that inform the approach in Steiner education that a lot of this cannot be directly taught, and instead, as a teacher, you indicate it, with a tone of voice, or look in your eye, or though modelling what you are paying attention to.

Referencing Ray Kelly Snr, I made the further reflection that this applies to:

> *Concepts like Country that you can enter into and start to see and live and Be through. They live in you and become part of you. And connect you more meaningfully to Place, Land and Experience. They're alive.* (journal entry, 23/05/224)

It seems to me that much of what we do educationally in ICs, or have the potential to do, lies in this domain of modelling in how we respond to things through our orientation towards them, and our framing of them, and through this – imparting, rather than directly teaching or explaining. While this notion of modelling might be taken to emphasise a showing of the outward object, rather what is meant here is an indication of the space of internalised understanding from which the speaker is speaking, and indicating this by example by tone of voice, encouragement or considered questions.

> Vignette 2:
>
> Several years ago, the study support team had a professional development session conducted by a staff member from the Indigenous knowledge centre at our institution. Among the things explained by the facilitator were song lines and the notion of sacred places on Country, that were limited to special access. She shared her memories of car trips when she was younger and stopping at certain places. As she spoke, I felt the walls of the room dissipate until I could feel the grass and granularity of the earth beneath my feet and the air on my face. It was as if what looked the most solid at face value – the bricks and mortar of the university – were rendered ephemeral against the enduring, deeper reality of the natural world with which she was more in tune. Her connection, I could only assume, was enabling me for a moment to be in tune also. This did not have the feel of a momentary daydream or reverie, but rather a concrete, tangible happening, like playing with a very good musician who

> brings you to a higher level of creativity than you are, on your own, capable of.

The spaces that we speak out of, as an ALL practitioner, can matter and make a difference. Our disciplinary understandings, our knowledge of academic cultures, academic literacy development pragmatics and processes, our own background experiences with learning and of being part of learning communities can all contribute not only to what we can say to a student, but to how we might say it (and how the latter might indicate a complex field of understanding that is being entered into). Built into such choices are evaluative judgments regarding what a student is ready to hear, or what the likely most productive next step(s) for them will be. Many aspects of this thinking are captured in formal pedagogies of all kinds, yet when it is done well, the interaction can have the quality of an exchange through which we are caught up for a time in an dialogic space characterised by a quality of presence necessary for true dialogue (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010, p. 12), and somethings shifts – even if its only something small. An example might be to meet a time pressured request for clarification of referencing format with something as simple as expressed enthusiasm for the convention of referencing itself, with a hint towards the function it plays in upholding the democratic spirit of the Western academic knowledge tradition (that is, through inviting critique of any academic claim and facilitating this through the checking of sources made available in a consistent format). Sometimes this rationale might be directly mentioned, if the opening is there. However, a seed can be planted as effectively with the tone of voice and efficiency of response, and a subtle phrase or two hinting that a knowledge community is being joined through the process being enacted. Equally, the search for the correct format might involve a thinking out loud response, which points to a landscape by signalling options suggestive of the terrain being covered through what appears an otherwise menial or perfunctory task, but in fact holds great salience within an academic context.

5. Conclusion

This paper has presented an autoethnographic meditative inquiry of my ALL practice. Spurred by the suggestion from a student that my experience in a contemplative knowledge community meant I was already bringing contemplative perspectives to my Individual Consultations (ICs) practice, I set out to explore this possibility. I drew on autobiographical experience in combination with reflective journal notes collected over a period of 18 months. The contemplative knowledge community mentioned was a Steiner community, surrounding a Steiner school, underpinned by an engagement in the contemplative body of knowledge Rudolf Steiner termed Anthroposophy. As Haberlin (2024), referencing Kabat-Zinn has observed, ‘Inquiry’ doesn’t necessary mean looking for answers, particularly quick answers, but rather sitting with the questions (p. 1977). My guiding themes, or domains of questioning, have included the interior life taken seriously and the ideas of living thinking and language. Sub-themes that emerged included questions of bringing “a wider sense of the person”, “heart”, “presence”, and “thinking” into my ALL practice. And further, a focus on process and the notion of “imparting” as a complement to direct teaching or advising. These were discussed along with elements drawn from my biography through a form of braided narrative (Tracy, 2019).

I have modelled in this paper an approach to examining one ALL practitioner’s background experience and how it might inform and deepen their IC practice through a recursive reflective process. Doing so responds to the recognition within ALL scholarship that conducting research on our own practices, including what forms us as “agentic actors”, helps both build our own knowledge base and contributes to ALL practice gaining clearer recognition as a profession (Edwards et al., 2015; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007). By bringing contemplative perspectives formally into the sphere of consideration for ALL as field of practice, I have pointed to a domain of understanding and practice that might add a fruitful dimension to this enterprise. I have raised the question: what might the widened epistemologies and ontologies offered by contemplative practices and perspectives offer? While I hope to have encouraged intellectual considerations of that

question, I have created a space where consideration can be extended to how bringing such perspectives might not only be perceived intellectually, but how they might *feel*. As Boud (2010) has noted, "although the mind cannot be separated from the body, higher education institutions sometimes operate as if they were only dealing with minds" (p. 30). Practice cannot be detached meaningfully from the person, Boud points out, and practitioners have a stake in what they do: "they have feelings and emotions about their professional work and these have an impact on what they do" (p. 34). Boud's comment that participants in reflection must choose to do so freely, without coercion, because if they do not "they cannot effectively engage with the embodied nature of practice" (p. 35). This view chimes and overlaps with contemplative practices that value, and often place high importance on, individuals coming to such practices and ideas in freedom. For myself, the more I step into such spaces, the more I feel I can bring of myself to my ICs. As has been emphasised throughout this paper, that I adopt this stance does not mean – and is not intended to suggest – others will. If others find bringing more of themselves to their ICs through such practices, however, then the question might be asked, what might this mean not only for how we see ourselves as professionals but how we feel and understand ourselves as a field of practice? It also leads to the further question, what might the conditions of possibility be for a conception of ALL that builds in (rather than bolts on, to use Louise Wignall's (1988) insightful phrase), existential awareness (epistemologically and ontologically)?

Declarations

1. **Ethics approval**: Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee, HAE-20-007.
2. **Competing / conflict of interests:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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