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Rewriting history: A poetic approach to the moral
transformation of leadership practice

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ABSTRACT

Galvanised by the triple crises of representation, legitimation and praxis, proponents of qualitative-interpretive research appear to be 'searching for handholds' within a self-realised and elusive poststructuralist environment. This paper identifies handholds inherent in the reactions of the first author, in his primary role as a school leader, as he attempts to resolve a moral issue involving a controversial teacher-student relationship. We illustrate the explorations of the first author as researcher into the interplay between theory, research and practice, whose nexus exists in the 'space' of his lived experience. In a mindful analysis of his interactions with others (school colleagues, students, administrators, other writers), the researcher's rewriting of his own leadership history releases the transformational power of writing-for-inquiry. During this part-imaginary and reflexive process, the developing construct of phronesis is used as a referent for facilitating a major perspective-transformation in the researcher-as-school-leader. We conclude that critical and poetic forms of phronesis can offer a postmodern advancement to the concept of praxis in developing school-based moral leadership.

A Story for Our Times – Part 1

Marie came into the office wanting to see me about an issue. It turns out that Damien is getting too close to a female student. Marie tells me she has discussed it with him as his line manager, that Albert has tried to talk to him about it as a colleague, that Damien is paying no attention. The issue: leaving his class unattended to stand around chatting with the student who is out of class to go to the toilet and walked past Damien's class; the student not going to her own class but sitting in Damien's class while he is teaching (another year group!); meeting up with her at lunchtime for 'a chat'.

"I've tried to explain it to him, Les, but he's not paying any attention. I've told him that staff are talking about it – students are talking about it, but he says they should come and see him if they really care. I don't know what to do next."

During her description, I find myself playing over in my head previous discussions with Marie, memories of her particular way of working. She is a very thorough 'get it done' person, she's not a 'gonna' as Steph (the Principal) would say. But she

is, as Marie puts it herself, '...anal- retentive'. She is a very down the line person, a 'maintain a metre' distance from the students on desk supervision kind of teacher – (I wonder how she would respond to the sight of students rubbing the bald spot on my head, or draping over my shoulder when I am on duty, or in classes?). But this is not the same. Marie has a point if what she is saying is true.

"It's the same as last year," she adds. "We had exactly the same issue last year...with another girl." I fall back into wondering if Marie and the other teachers from 'the girls' table' are a little jealous over the fact that the young male teacher is not paying any attention to them – they are power-brokers within the school. The dying ring of "What do I do next?" brings me back from my deliberations.

ORIENTATION

What would you do? T here you are, a desk full of 'In T ray', a 'T o Do' list as long as your arm, a whiteboard full of deadlines and a school struggling with mandated change. A nd that's not to mention the academic pressures of a Doctoral study! How does a school leader approach a problem like this...? How would you...?

T his paper is written with the intention of involving you in the experience I have outlined above. I have structured it temporally, in much the same way as I have come to make sense of the incident, breaking the narrative to give you time to reflect on the developments in the story. I hope you take the time to pause at each stage, to add your understandings to the developing story, to become a writer in this writerly text (Freshwater & Rolfe, 2004).

The story running through this paper is a composite construction. A Story of our Times (Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4) is a journal entry from my time as a Deputy at a large city high school in the throes of significant educational reform. It outlines one of the issues that confronted me, the thoughts I had at the time, and my attempt at resolution. It was written within a very short time of the actual events, either that evening or the one following. Damien's Story (Part 5) and Susan's Story (Part 6) are very different. They are fictional representations, literary constructions of how Damien and Susan *might* have been thinking at the time. Of course, they do not speak *for* Damien or Susan; they are my alternative takes on the issue.

Each story, the reconstructed memory and the fictional, are born of different times and different contexts: A Story of our Times (Parts 1, 2, 3 and 4) is a reflection written close to the time of the

experience, while I was still emotionally and professionally emerged in the environment of the incident: the individuals, the culture, the problems and the constraints, and the shifting sands of my own developing practice. During this time I attempted to hold theorising in abeyance, as best as I was able, to avoid the temptation to respond to contextual situations through the lenses of disconnected theory. Damien's and Susan's Stories, however, were written recently, looking back on the experience, attempting to make sense of the event utilising theoretical perspectives. I am now, as a teacher educator in a university, professionally and, perhaps emotionally, distanced from the issue.

This paper is a poetic attempt to develop my praxis as a leader. *We all bring to our practice ideas of what constitutes our role; its nature and its function. These ideas, of course, impact on how we carry out our roles. What are your ideas about leadership? How clear are you on what leadership entails?* I am hoping that my investigation of issues that (may have) surrounded Damien's relationship with Susan will serve to develop my personal understandings of what it means to be a leader.

LEADERSHIP? WHAT ARE WE SAYING?

For the most part, the study of leadership has dwelt on issues of style and levels of decision-making, assessing the consequences of their variations for followers' satisfaction, individual compliance and performance, and organisational effectiveness. Which style is better – warm or cold, autocratic or democratic, task or relationship, directive or participatory, initiating structure or consideration, production emphasis or personal emphasis? When is it best to tell, sell participate and delegate? Do circumstances of the job favour the related, dedicated, separated, or integrated leadership style? Best is defined as what gets subordinates to do what the leader wants and be happy about it. If enough subordinates respond appropriately, then the organization presumably will be more effective. When this research is packaged for popular consumption, *leadership* becomes little more than a buzzword – patter for workshop providers and an elixir for policy-makers intent on improving schools. Both promise much but provide little. (Sergiovanni, 1992, pp2-3).

This has been my experience. I have quoted Thomas Sergiovanni at length, here, as this extract epitomises my personal anxieties as a professional educator in the school environment. Although I have no doubt that the literature on leadership is backed by research, it always seemed to me that the advice was fragmentary, that it lacked contextual significance while simultaneously offering a panacea - but what was missing always seemed to be the part I needed most!

Traditional leadership models aim at techniques for encouraging staff to enact externally generated objectives. There is a tacit emphasis on managing (controlling) the 'workers'. But this has the effect of creating the need for managers, the need for leaders (Sergiovanni, 1992). An alternative perspective emphasises the need to transform beliefs and paradigms in order to make management and leadership, in many traditional ways, redundant.

One of the key issues in educational reform is the difficulty of achieving successful and enduring educational change (Beatty, 2000; Evans, 1993; Fullan, 1997; Hargreaves, 1997; Wagner, 1993). Seymour Papert (1995) recognises this as a difference between 'reform' and 'change'. There is evidence that educational change is brought about more by evolution than by any initiatives aimed

at reform (Papert, 1995; Pereira, 2001). It is perhaps this issue that most strongly supports Sergiovanni's (1992) construct of 'followership'. The notion of followership recognises that 'subordinates' limit their actions to what they *have* to do. While there is a pressure to conform they will 'go along' with what is being pushed, but only while there is a pressure. Followers, on the other hand, are emotionally committed to an idea. They do not need to be managed in a traditional sense and their internal commitment suggests they will attempt to continue once the 'leader' has moved on. It may be that this self-sustaining commitment can be enacted through a sense of moral purpose. The perception of a lack of moral purpose behind managerial and market-place driven changes in education are a contemporary concern (Edwardes, 2000) pointing towards the need for a moral dimension in leadership practices that emphasise commitment to ideas, to higher purposes.

Transformational learning/leadership is a movement that has gained much currency in recent years. Jack Mezirow's original coining of the term reflected the transforming of one's own frame of reference. His more recent work (Mezirow, 1991), informed by Jurgen Habermas, puts forward a theory of transformative learning "that can explain how adult learners make sense or meaning of their experiences, the nature of the structures that influence the way they construe experience, the dynamics involved in modifying meanings, and the way the structures of meaning themselves undergo changes when learners find them to be dysfunctional" (quoted in Brookfield, 1995a, p2). The inclusion of Habermas' work implies a critical modification of the original conception of transformational learning and supports an emancipatory ethic. A referent of transformational learning has much to offer those who have been entrusted with a leadership role

But unfortunately, as with all previous leadership models, transformational leadership can be hijacked and used as a tool in an attempt to control the other. Some researchers have argued for transformational leadership as a technique that treats the other as an object: "This form of leadership is considered crucial for the implementation of large scale innovations by teachers.... Transformational leadership appears to be necessary to drive teachers to the higher levels of concern and motivation that are needed for such kind of educational improvement" (Geijsel, Sleegers, & van den Berg, 1999, p309). Such an implied focus on control ('implementation'; 'drive') is at odds with the emancipatory ethic behind transformational approaches. The moral dimension called for earlier may serve to realign transformational approaches with Habermas' notion of communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987).

Professional practice has a voice that has largely been ignored within the literature of traditional school-leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992). It is with this in mind that I put forward the following episode from my lived experience as a Deputy Principal, my attempts at making sense of it, and the lessons I have learned as a result of my work as a teacher-researcher. My interest, perhaps epitomising postmodernist assumptions, lies in attempting to develop broader, richer understandings of what it means to engage in leadership that is driven by a commitment to transformational learning. Max van Manen (1990) has suggested that this kind of study, one that aims to explore the *essence* of what it is to be a leader, is essentially phenomenological. It is a study of lived experience in which: '...we are less interested in the factual status of particular instances....[than] existential meanings; it attempts to describe and interpret these meanings to a certain degree of depth and richness,' (van Manen, 1990, pp10-11). I will return to this point later. But for now, on with the story...

A Story for Our Times – Part 1 continued

"I'll speak to Steph and just check that she's happy with what I'm thinking," I conclude after outlining my plan. Marie apologises for 'dumping' this on me as she makes her way off to class.

Steph agrees with me taking it over – another job! It's too late for me to catch up with Damien before the end of the day so I leave a polite note in his pigeon hole asking him to come and see me period 4 the next day when he and Marie are free.

Part 2 - The next day...

Damien grabs me as I walk through the door, still carrying my bag. "I've got your note. Can we talk about it now?" *He doesn't need to ask me what it's about.*

"Not really, Damien. I have scheduled it so that Marie can be there as well."

"Does she need to be? Can't we just get it over with now? I'll forego the right to have her there."

"Well Marie is your line manager, Damien, so I want her to hear what's being said." He leaves, not very happy.

Part 3 - Some time to reflect

Fortunately, rather than by clever planning, I had given myself some space to think about the issues as I saw them. By arranging for the meeting to occur the day after Marie raised her concerns, I had the evening to get a 'centre' from which to respond. My thoughts weren't clear-cut although they did widen my understanding - a little.

An entry from my Journal

I have a lot of empathy for Damien. Marie's concerns may have some validity and, if there is any truth in her claims, Damien is playing very close to the line. He is a little bit of a maverick, displaying the self-assured self-reliance of others like him, like me, who have come from industry, who know that schools are just one part of life's experiences. He chooses to spend his lunch times, alongside two of the other young male teachers, out by the Aboriginal Centre or on the oval, where

students can see him, while Marie sits at the unwelcoming 'Girls' table'. And this pays off; very rarely does he have significant problems with his students. Marie's concerns seem to originate from the clarity of the line she draws between the student-teacher relationship. Marie doesn't like blurry edges.

But how does a teacher develop a relationship that opens the door to genuine learning, to discussions that have life value? Marie would probably call into question some of the relationships I have had with students - I don't think she would understand. But the quality of relationship is central for a teacher and a student. I find it difficult to believe a passion for life-learning can be achieved through the sterile solution of linear equations (my subject area), or exercises in balancing the books in accounting (Marie's subject area). Much of the interaction that develops this kind of relationship is in the incidental, 'off-task' conversations through which a teacher gains understanding of a student's orientations, interests and standpoint in the world. And on the student's side, maybe conversations about content and assignments are seen as part of the 'job' whereas other time is 'given freely', carrying with it an implication of care; it's not part of the mandated curriculum.

Marie's approach is not mine. She is very business-like: rules, policy, and guidelines. As the Curriculum Officer she has produced mountains of newsletters, booklets of strategies and Curriculum Improvement Program updates that everybody commends but few have read. She is excellent at getting the paperwork done and takes her role as a Teacher-in-Charge very seriously. She has little time for people who don't 'do their job'. It is this approach, a concern for 'professionalism' that has brought her to me. She is concerned about Damien: 'he's not being very professional!'

But what is professional? Marie has very clear (dogmatic?) views about what it is to be a teacher and, like everybody, makes judgements according to her beliefs. She seems to acknowledge very few wavy

edges in the boundaries of her knowledge; she doesn't look for the blur, the shadow. In all of our interactions, I have difficulty thinking of a time when she wasn't looking for clarification of an issue, the Admin 'line', policy directions, the Agenda, and minutes, minutes, minutes, other than when she was passing on staff complaints – she is always a valuable staff barometer. But like all of us, there is what she says and what she does; she doesn't always live up to her own standards. I have seen her standing outside her classroom chatting with other teachers while her class is working, a concern she has raised about Damien. Students have told me she takes phone calls in class, a complaint she has made about David (another member of Marie's department). I have seen her powerful, no-nonsense persona dissolve in tears as a result of Mario's (a colleague's) threatening behaviour and her refusal to take up my help in addressing it in a 'professional' way.

I can't help considering the role of the 'Girls' table' in bringing Marie forward. They are power brokers within the school, Steph and I have discussed this a number of times, and they don't have time for the three young male teachers on staff, of which Damien is one. Gossip can be very useful in monitoring the temperature of the school but can also create a reality that didn't previously exist. Their role in this is worrying for me. If there is no need for concern their involvement could create one.

But the question remains, if there is any truth in the concerns that Marie has raised, how do I guide Damien away from what could become a sticky situation? The slightest hint of this kind of misconduct is a problem. If there is no truth I will need to bring the rumouring to a halt – and there is fat chance of that. Damien and I are both trapped!

Before you read any further, I invite you to pause. You now have a little more of the context, or at least my perspective of the context, to consider. Has anything changed for you? Has the context muddied the waters? How would you proceed now...?

Part 4 - Later that day...

Marie turns out to be unable to make the meeting – due to a timetable mix-up she actually has a class at that time. It's Friday, and if I don't speak to him today he's got all the weekend ahead of him. We agree to talk about it period 3 and for me to talk to Marie separately – Damien doesn't know that I am involved because I have already spoken to Marie.

"So what's it about?" Damien asks, maintaining the pretence. I am sitting sideways on to him on the 'customer' side of the desk. He is clearly agitated and is hoping he's wrong about the topic for discussion.

"Staff and students are talking about your relationship with a student."

"Oh, not again. This happened last year." *Ooops!* "Who's complaining?"

"Well I can't say, Damien but concerns have been raised by several staff and a number of students." I don't say that they have approached Marie not me.

"This is bullshit. They just want something to talk about. There's nothing going on."

"Well, I'm told that..." I outline the things that Marie has told me.

Damien lies. He says that may have happened but ages ago. He, of course, continues to get angry and maintains a complete denial. "We're just mates."

"I guess that's part of the problem, Damien. You can't be 'mates' with her, she's a student and you have to maintain a teacher-student relationship."

"You're picking me up on my words..." I point out that I want to make sure we are both perfectly clear about what we mean. He is not happy. I explain the danger of the situation, that a teacher can't risk even unfounded gossip..."There's nothing going on," he repeats, a little more loudly, a little more insistent.

"Does she feel the same way?"

"What?" He looks straight at me, the lines of a frown developing above his semi-closed eyes.

"Does she feel the same way? Does she have any feelings for you?" There's no answer. Silence. "She has to go to her own

classes, Damien. And you have to put some space between you." He is looking down at the floor, his face still flushed from his earlier frustrations.

"So do you think I should talk to her, tell her that we should 'cool' it?" I don't ask what there is to 'cool' – but as time goes on I am getting more convinced that Marie has called it correctly.

"Damien it needs to come to an end. Perceptions do count and that is why your colleagues are concerned. They are worried you don't understand the position you are placing yourself in."

"So concerned they don't talk to me!" *I don't believe it either.*

"If it continues, Damien, by you or her, I will have to arrange a parent interview." He goes white. *That clinched it. It'll finish.*

Damien leaves. He is not happy. Neither am I.

Did I read the situation correctly? Did I take the right tack? If so, why am I discontented with the outcome? You now have as much of the story as I have. Was your reading different to mine?

THE PROBLEM BEING INVESTIGATED – WHY THIS PAPER?

So how *does* a leader make sense of the highly complex behaviours and situations that occur when people are brought together? What advice *is* available to guide effective decision-making for the less than perfect leader? My background, experience, and distaste for formulaic approaches to complex situations has made me very wary of espoused models of effective leadership practice - while they often provide valuable insight, they also seem to be overly simplistic, and lacking in real-time, contextual responsiveness. And I'm not alone; Thomas Sergiovanni (1992) has argued that current leadership models are hindering attempts at making significant, long-lasting improvements to schools.

This incident characterises many highly complex situations I experienced as a Deputy. However I looked at this issue there seemed to be no satisfactory solution. In the school context I struggled with understanding the variety of responses that individuals would make. I found it difficult to understand why people would interpret situations, proposals, and ideas in such diverse ways. Perhaps 'why' is not the right word? I knew 'why' people interpreted things so differently, but now it was my job to try to pull people together, to help create understandings and approaches that would facilitate collegial and supportive relationships. Settling for 'why' was a luxury I could no longer afford; I needed to know how to move forward. It seemed that I always had to make a decision resulting in someone being unhappy – I could never meet everybody's needs, but even more distressing, I could never meet my own. In hindsight, it was never going to be possible to resolve incidents to everybody's satisfaction; that was never a realistic goal to pursue. But what I did need

was a way of making sense of the complexities of the situations: so that I could be satisfied that I had moved towards a balanced understanding which would support a more informed leadership practice. Brenda Beatty has suggested that what is needed is a deeper connection to contextual features of incidents: "deep emotional understanding requires access to what oneself and others are really feeling, something that has been professionally hidden in the traditional models of [teaching and] leading," (Beatty, 2000, p10)

Enter Phronesis

During the writing of my journal of school experiences I had attempted to isolate my data collection from theory but, I guess like all researchers, I couldn't stop reading. I had been looking at the work of Jurgen Habermas, and Shirley Grundy's interpretations of Habermas' Knowledge Constitutive Interests (Grundy, 1987). This introduced me to the concepts of Phronesis and Praxis. Having previously investigated Stephen Brookfield's work (Brookfield, 1986, 1995a, 1995b, 1998) and that of Jack Mezirow (Mezirow, 1990a, 1997, 1998, 1990b) I became quite enamoured with the idea that Praxis (practical action responsive to context) is based on Phronesis (practical wisdom) and could assist me in transforming my own practice. Further, Phronesis, in its focus on human experience, opened the door for an exploration of alternative perspectives. This enabled me to enlist the aid of fiction-stories (Richardson, 2000) through which I could expose myself to alternative perspectives, and existing works of literature (van Manen, 1990) that might shed further light on the issue. Phronesis helped me to reinterpret history (Wall, 2003) and enabled me to make (possible) sense of Damien's perspective.

Part 5 - Damien's Story

Damien makes a sharp exit from the Deputy's office. It's five minutes to recess and he heads to the canteen to pick up his order but, uncharacteristically, turns off and makes his way back to his office. The students will discover the Three Musketeers are one down today; there'll be one less teacher to chat to outside the Aboriginal Centre. Scott and Matt will have to look after things. He knows the office will be quiet; the 'Girls' will be holding court in the staff room. He flops into the chair after closing the door, and as he runs over the incident in his mind, his eyes begin to focus as his temper rises.

A parent interview! If it continues! NOTHING'S HAPPENING! What the hell's the matter with everyone? She's a kid for Christ's sake. Who the hell do these people think I am, a child molester? They're supposed to be my colleagues. What colleagues! Talking behind my back, it makes me sick. They could have told me if they were so concerned. Neither Albert nor Marie understand...and how could they? They have no relationship with any of their students...it's like they still teach in the twenties. But Scott, Matt, Paul? I get to know students, treat them as people, not 'things'. They understand that. Is that unprofessional? Albert and Marie would still have them lining up outside the door! Shit. Professional...she doesn't even know the meaning of the word. She's never been in industry. For her it's all about following rules. The rules. Whose bloody rules? She's such an idiot. I bet she's behind this: her and her mates

- the 'Girls'. It's just like last year...the same thing all over again. She's been on at me since I first got here. Well, since they made me so unwelcome at 'their table'. She's power bloody mad. I thought we'd already cleared this up, I should have guessed. She must have some issue of her own. What's the difference between me developing a relationship with Susan and developing a relationship with Jacob? They're both Year 12's; I've been their teacher. How come they haven't mentioned Jacob? Because he's a boy? Of course I have a better relationship with Susan, I coach her soccer team twice a week after school. But I've maintained a teacher-student relationship - I don't allow her to call me by my first name at school. All the kids call me 'Damien' at training. What's the big deal? How could they think I would...

With Damien's voice contributing to the story I found myself wondering. What effect has Damien's story had on your perspective? On your satisfaction with the outcome of the meeting...?

This put a completely different perspective on the whole incident. I began to wonder how Damien might have perceived the whole thing: my meeting with him; Marie's passing on of the problem (if he had realised this was what had happened); the effect on his working relationships with his colleagues...

Phronesis' concern for gaining wider perspectives, coupled with Max van Manen's (1990) suggestions to look at the literary world pointed me towards the autobiographical work *To Sir, With Love* (Braithwaite, 1959). Edward Ricardo Braithwaite's description of his first year of teaching in an inner-London school offered a similar scenario but generated an altogether different line of thinking which reminded me of Sting's description (1986) of his years as a teacher in England.

She waited until the first few opening bars of the beautiful evergreen 'In the Still of the Night' floated over the room then turned and walked towards me, invitation large in her clear eyes and secretly smiling lips. I moved to meet her and she walked into my arms, easily, confidently, as if she belonged there. There was no hesitation, no pause to synchronise our steps; the music and the magic of the moment took us and wove us together in smooth movement. I was aware of her, of her soft breathing, her firm roundness, and the rhythmic moving of her thighs. She was a woman, there was no doubt about it, and she invaded my mind and my body. The music ended, all too soon. We were locked together for a moment, then released.

'Thank you, Pamela.'

'After I leave school may I come and see you sometimes?'

'Of course, I'd be very pleased to see you any time.'

'Thank you. 'Bye, Sir.'

'Bye, Pamela.'

It's no use
He sees her
He starts to shake
he starts to cough

Temptation
Frustration
So bad it makes him cry

(Sting, 1986)

(Braithwaite, 1959, p187)

It seemed that the issue Damien found himself in was not a unique event. At least two other teachers, who had moved into other fields of endeavour, had committed their experiences to paper. But this begged the question: how did their situations resolve themselves? Although I have found no resolution of Sting's situation, Braithwaite's description was a rich educative source.

So there it was. Somewhere deep inside of me I had known it all along but had refused to acknowledge it, because in spite of her full body and grown-up attitude, she was to me a child, and one who was in my care. I could appreciate that the emotional stirrings within her might be serious and important to her – it was not uncommon for girls of fifteen to be engaged or even married – but although I liked and admired her, she was to me only one of my class, and I felt a fatherly responsibility for her as for all the others.

(Braithwaite, 1959, p110)

Rick took his concerns to Grace, a female member of staff, for advice.

'Well Rick, are you surprised?'

'Look Grace, this is no time for jokes. I need advice because this thing is quite outside my experience.'

'I'm not joking, Rick. This sort of thing happens all the time whenever there are men teachers and girl students, from the infants, right through to high school and university. Here sit down and let me bring you up to date.'

We made ourselves comfortable and she continued:

'There hasn't been a really good man teacher in this school for ages – I'm not including the Old Man. We've been having a procession of all types. The fellows these girls have seen here have been, on the whole, scruffy, untidy men who can't be bothered to brush their teeth or their shoes, let alone do something about their shapeless ill-fitting clothes. Good God, those twerps tootle off to a training college and somehow acquire a certificate, a licence to teach, and then they appear in a classroom looking like last week's leftovers!Then along comes Mr Rick Braithwaite. His clothes are well cut, pressed and neat; clean shoes, shaved, teeth sparkling, tie and handkerchief matching as if he'd stepped out of a ruddy bandbox. He's big and broad and handsome. Good God, man, what the hell else did you expect? You're so different from their fathers and brothers and neighbours. And they like you; you treat them like nice people for a change. When they come up here for cookery or needlework all I hear from them is "Sir this, Sir that, Sir said, Sir said," until I'm damn near sick of the sound of it.... You treat them with kindness and courtesy and what's more they're learning a lot with you. Be patient with Pamela. She's only just finding out that she's a grown woman, and you're probably the first real man she's met. Be tactful and I'm sure she'll soon pull herself together.'

(Braithwaite, 1959, pp111-112)

How does Rick's description of his experience add to your picture of this situation? If you have seen 'To Sir, with Love' you would almost certainly have 'warmed' to Poitier's portrayal of Rick. Does that affect your reading of the situation? What has been your experience of student-staff relationships? Have you ever witnessed/experienced this situation yourself? How does that affect the way you are reading/writing the story...?

This line of research opened up another possible source of information. Peter suggested I ask one of my daughters (I have four) to write something from the perspective of a young girl, so I rang Christa and tried to explain what I was doing.

"Oh yes," she laughed into the phone. "I know *exactly* what you mean! Every one of my friends has had a crush on a teacher." Christa is rather secretive with respect to her own interests, so nothing was forthcoming on that front! Oh well, the joys of fatherhood...

What follows is my Christa's literary construction of Susan's story based on her own experiences with her school friends. Again, Sting offered a parallel insight.

Part 6 – Susan's Story

Dear Diary,

You'll never guess what happened today. At lunch Penny told us that there was a HOT new English teacher. Jaz and I pumped her for info - hey can you blame us? Being the principal's daughter, she knows ALL the goss, and is the information point for the whole school. Anyway, the low down was: 24, unmarried, just out of uni and drives a battered up Toyota.

Young teacher
The subject
Of schoolgirl
fantasy

Jaz and I couldn't WAIT for English! I walked into class trying to appear casual and stopped dead in my tracks. There was A GOD! Jaz bashed into me (also not looking where she was going) and he looked up to see what the commotion was. He gave us a smile and said 'Hello'. Then dimwit Justin Forbes crashed into us and we went flying! A perfect opportunity to say 'Hi' and introduce myself gone down the toilet. Now I'll have to wait for him to learn my name among 30 other students! Ugh!

He did speak to me again that period, only me, not the rest of the class. He was explaining something about grammar but all I could hear was his voice drifting through my head. Then I hear "Is my English class so boring that you must day dream through it?" I snapped back to reality pretty quickly! I whispered out a quick "Sorry sir" and turned bright red! If only he knew what I was day dreaming about!

Book marking
She's so close now
This girl is half his
age

Anyways, he's got brown hair, green eyes (I got a good look when he spoke to me about day dreaming), and the most GORGEOUS smile! Not to mention a DREAMY voice...

Jaz and I saw him driving away from school and my eyes followed him down the street. So did Jaz's but she wasn't lookin' at him the way I was...do.

(Sting, 1986)

Jaz and I had planned to skip our afternoon classes

tomorrow but I'll try and get her to skip the morning ones instead...now I'll have a reason not to wag English. Lou's having a slumber party this weekend. All girls so you know it's gonna be all truth and dare. It's not usual that I'm the one trying to keep my own secrets though.

Love and kisses,
Susie

xoxo

Dear Diary,

Well, it's our anniversary today. Two years to the day since I wandered into class and he said 'Hi'. It seems like forever...and just think of everything that's happened since then! I thought I'd make a thing out of it and did my hair really nice, just like at the yr 11 ball when he told me how nice I looked. I put on the sapphire earrings I got for my last birthday and some lip gloss.

Here's my moment by moment recount of the afternoon...(!)

At the end of class everyone filed out except for a few girls who were pestering him. Damien dealt with them and then turned to me.

"Happy anniversary, sir." I said.

"Anniversary?" he asked, shuffling his papers.

"2 years since you joined our class."

Damien thought for a moment and smiled at me.

"Yeah. I'd forgotten." There was silence as he organised his stuff and I kept him company, perched on the corner of his desk as usual. "So how did Netball tryouts go?"

I told him about mum and dad giving in and letting me play - on condition that I up my marks.

"Yeah, my parents were the same when I wanted to play footy."

"What happened?" I asked, always willing to listen when he shares his confidence with me.

"I upped my marks and here I am - a English teacher."

"An," I laughed. "An English teacher."

Damien laughed too. "You don't need to up your English marks at all. Why'd they say that?"

"You know what parents are like." I shrugged.

"Yeah, I do." He replied thoughtfully. "Well, I'd better be off."

"I'll walk you to your office." I said, grabbing my file and leaning it on my hip.

And so I did, enjoying our usual constitutional, and

She wants him
So badly
Knows what she
wants
to be

[Her friends are]
So jealous
You know how bad
girls get
Sometimes it's not so
easy
To be the teacher's
pet

convincing him to lend a lunchtime to helping me with my next essay – to keep my parents off of my back. Tomorrow is his turn for lunch duty so I get a whole twenty minutes of watching him wander about the school (from my groups' usual 'loitering' position – as Damien calls it).

Inside her
There's longing
This girl's an open
page

(Sting, 1986)

*Talk to you tomorrow,
Love and kisses,*

Sue

xoxo

I found myself recognising some overlap between Grace's perspective of the situation (as told to Rick, above) and my daughter's high school experiences as demonstrated in 'Susan's Story'? So now, your daughter contributes another perspective. How does this affect your thoughts on how to handle this kind of situation...?

WRITING AS INQUIRY

The storied approach is representative of a method I am using in a study of transformational leadership. Much has been written about the value of reflecting on past experience to gain a greater understanding of one's own practice (Brookfield, 1995b; McNiff, 1995; Mezirow, 1990b; Tripp, 1994; van Manen, 1990; Whitehead, 1989). Several researchers have explored the importance of the past, perhaps especially the tacit past, in directing future actions: (Bohm, 1994; Covey, 1990; Damasio, 1994; Ford & Ford, 1987; Rogers, 1967; Romm, 2003; Tripp, 1994; van Manen, 1990; Von Glaserfeld, 1989; Williams, Williams, Guray, Bertram, & McCormack, 1994). And in the Qualitative research domain, the centrality of writing as a technique has been recognised as a powerful way for generating meaning (Geelan & Taylor, 2001; Janesick, 2000; Richardson, 1994, 2000; Stapleton & Taylor, 2003; van Maanen, 1988; van Manen, 2001). I have been guided by much of this research, combined with a sensitivity to a postmodernist call for multiple perspectives, to use the idea of a fiction-story (Richardson, 2000) to position myself outside of the story of Damien and Susan's relationship.

My initial attempt to produce a literary construction of Damien's perspective proved to be very educative. Damien's story was one of two episodes from my school experience that seemed suitable as vehicles for this paper: Damien's Story and Phil's Story. Although I favoured the story centred on Damien I found it much easier to create an alternative perspective for Phil's Story. In fact, the eventual first draft of Damien's story made him look guilty. Consequently, I focused on Phil's story.

Why was it so difficult to come up with another perspective for Damien? In hindsight, I think it was because I really did believe that Damien was 'guilty' of the 'crimes' that Marie had brought to my attention. My tacit belief that this was the case became exposed through the construction of the first draft. In itself, this realisation had a very powerful effect on my thinking and supported the

concept of self-investigation through literary construction: fiction stories could provide insight into my own beliefs and tacit assumptions.

I decided that I would persevere with Damien's story and began to play with ideas. I needed a positioning guide that would help me to investigate the story from Damien's perspective. I took the approach of writing with the deliberate intention of making the subject of the story into the 'hero'. This enabled me to become the advocate for the central character in each story by focusing on our egocentric interpretations of life experiences. As the author, the characters became my 'children' and my writing began to reflect a sympathy (or empathy?) for the hero: I recognised my own desire to be the hero in the actions of the characters reminding me of the Dalai Lama's recognition of "...our basic sameness as human beings' (Tenzin, 2000, p4).

This concept of rewriting history, of rewriting for the hero, had a marked effect on my original stance. I was able to generate alternative perspectives that removed me from centre stage. My perspective of the issue became less focused on my own narrow concerns and more inclusive of the difficulties for the other actors. Further, concern for the new hero acted as a balance against my own assumptions.

EXPOSING HIDDEN POSSIBILITIES

Writing this paper has deepened my understanding of the issues that surround(ed) the dilemma of Damien's relationship, issues that were hidden from me when I was originally faced with the problem. One might argue that this change has been brought about by new information but this is not the case. I created Damien's perspective; I had previously read 'To Sir, With Love', Rick Braithwaite's account of his teaching experience in an inner London school; I was familiar with the crushes that teenage girls have on male teachers (I have four daughters and have watched them build families with their favourite teachers on Sims!); and I was very conscious of Carol Gilligan's notion of an Ethic of Care. Yet, it was only through an investigation of the dimensions that Phronesis brought to my attention that I have come to view Damien's relationship with Susan in a different, more inclusive light.

A working description of Phronesis

The notion of Phronesis has proven to be a very powerful tool in understanding how to develop my praxis in leadership roles. It encourages adding a moral dimension to an often technical approach to decision-making associated with the hectic pace of teachers' lives. It can guide the leader towards a more inclusive and holistic understanding of a situation; an understanding that facilitates a more deliberative approach to decision-making, that considers a wider range of variables possibly impacting on what would make a 'good' decision. But Phronesis itself has a number of interpretations.

My initial understandings of the concept of Phronesis combined the work of Shirley Grundy (1987) with that of Lawrence Stenhouse and Donald Schon. Phronesis is conceptualised as an interplay between owned knowledge, judgement and taste:

- '**owned' knowledge** (ie knowledge made personal through reason and experience); Stenhouse (1984) suggested that the teacher as "The artist is the researcher par excellence,"

- *judgement* of when to act (in order to achieve the eidos, the guiding idea); [the WHEN]; Stenhouse (1984) agrees suggesting that "...ideas and people are not of much real use until they are digested to the point where they are subject to the teacher's own judgement."
- *taste*, or what is 'fitting' (or appropriate in a given situation) [the WHAT]; Schon (1983) cites Chris Alexander and his notion of recognising and correcting bad fit within a context, He talks about this ability as a function of tacit knowledge and references Geoffrey Vickers: "...it is through such tacit norms that all of us make the judgements, the qualitative appreciations of situations, on which our practical competence depends," (Schon, 1983, p53)

I saw phronesis as the overseer that informs praxis; the arbiter informing my interactions with the world.

Phronesis can also be viewed as the postmodernist version of Praxis. In the field of education the term Praxis brings together theory and practice while considering critical theorist concerns for the economic, political and social contexts impacting on particular issues (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). It is this connection with critical theory, and in particular critical pedagogy, that leads to a recognition that Praxis is rooted in modernist assumptions of reason, progress and truth (Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Phronesis, on the other hand, is cognizant of the hegemonies inherent in individual perspectives and attempts to guide action (or the choice of inaction) through a more integral understanding of moral decision-making.

Phronesis can remind us to become more aware of the many dimensions of situations, to respect the knowledge generated in practical settings, to examine the moral dimensions [of our teaching], and to work together cooperatively to solve problems.

(Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p58)

Recognising the power of alternative perspectives to generate deeper understandings is characteristic of postmodernist thought (Wilber, 2000): alternative perspectives of phronesis, if viewed as referents, can enable powerful meaning generation. John Wall, in proposing his own formulation of Phronesis, has drawn attention to the work of a number of different interpreters: Joseph Dunne, Alasdair McIntyre, Martha Nussbaum and Paul Ricoeur.

Like Henderson & Kesson, Joseph Dunne sees Phronesis as a safeguard against modernist assumptions of utilitarian progress – we'll build it because we can! For Dunne, Phronesis provides a "substantive moral compass" (Wall, 2003, p320) that tries to expand the discussion from modernist assumptions about progress to moral concerns about the 'goodness' of particular actions. Alasdair McIntyre also sees Phronesis as being concerned with moral decision-making. However, for McIntyre social ends are part of our moral consciousness as a result of our own histories: Phronesis simply provides the "...means by which we 'apply' already given moral truths (inherited from tradition) to our own particular present situation," (Wall, 2003, p321). Martha Nussbaum allocates Phronesis the task of overcoming 'moral obtuseness' and simplification. She sees moral perception, moral imagination and moral sensibility as phronetic capacities facilitating attention to, care of, and perception of human individuality, but further, as the end to which moral life aims (Wall, 2003).

Paul Ricoeur's approach, Critical Phronesis, aims to mediate between different moral worlds – that of the self and the others. In a very Radical Constructivist fashion, Ricoeur acknowledges the

impossibility of reducing others to our own understandings or interpretations of them. As such, Critical Phronesis recognises the "...singular and capable moral 'self' or 'will' who is other from all others," (Wall, 2003, p324) and advocates a recreation of one's self and one's practices to account for this inevitable difference.

John Wall's formulation of Phronesis builds upon the ideas of Ricoeur. Whereas Ricoeur saw Phronesis as aiming at generating a consensus, albeit an unobtainable one, Wall sees Poetic Phronesis as facilitating the creation of new meaning on the basis of the differences between individual perspectives. He argues there is a need for the creative reinterpretation of history resulting from an acknowledgement of otherness. Wall argues that with a phronetic approach "the self addresses its tragic incommensurability with others precisely *through* the innovative transformation of its own moral historicity," (Wall, 2003, p336). Poetic Phronesis generates social inclusivity through the generation of meaning that is based upon difference.

Critical and Poetic Phronesis have been powerful referents in the development of this paper. Through their filters I am required to recognise the narrowness of my own historical perspective and to 'poetically reshape' my own future practice. They draw a boundary around a focus ("the finite and limited practices of singular individuals," (Wall, 2003, p326)) and enable me to recognise the conflict between the larger historical forces of the past and my attempts to be me. Through their lenses, the self is seen as an ongoing poetic innovation (Wall, 2003). The over-riding features of these interpretations of Phronesis have led me towards an attempt to create new meanings, to reinterpret my lived experience in such a way as to account for each of the 'others', and to develop my practice in such a way as to mediate between the moral worlds of 'others' and myself. This is not an attempt at a watered-down consensus, however, but a return to my own narrative aims and practices after an exploration of, and taking account of, others.

Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus. If every Negro in the United States turns to violence, I [Martin Luther King Jr] will choose to be the one lone voice preaching that this is the wrong way. Maybe this sounds like arrogance. But it is not intended that way. It is simply my way of saying that I would sooner be a man of conviction than a man of conformity. (Carson, 2000, p331)

With respect to this particular incident I have found that these interpretations of Phronesis have served to expand my thoughts on Damien's relationship with Susan. I now find myself contemplating a number of issues embedded within the story's context: the concept of power relationships, the privileging of perspectives; the role of alternative perspectives of moral development in decision-making; and the need for strong moral leadership in the face of internal and external pressures for a particular decision.

On Power Relationships

You will, no doubt, have had some thoughts about the power relationships at play in Damien's story. What are they? Through what lenses do you see them? Have there been any changes as the story developed...?

Critical theorist perspectives tend to illuminate institutional forms of power relationships. An analysis of this story has highlighted various forms of power imbalances that may have served to

affect the actions and behaviours of the actors. It appears that power is an intrinsic feature of all interactions, whether intended or not, and the imbalance, more often than not, is inherent in the others' perception of an imbalance (Tannen, 1986). Power imbalances can show up in a number of ways:

1. **Personal power:** the perception of one's personal characteristics; eg. self-confidence, emotional strength, ability to formulate powerful arguments, etc; eg. Damien over Marie
2. **Positional power:** the perception of one's attributed position in the workplace or society; eg Marie's (Line Manager), Mine (Deputy Principal), Damien's (Teacher)
3. **Sexual power:** the perception of power originating in one's gender; eg. Damien's over Marie's; Damien's over Susan's; Susan's over Damien's,
4. **Moral power:** granted by virtue of positional power, cultural norms or hegemonic theories; eg Marie over Damien
5. **Experience power:** granted by virtue of one's age or experiential seniority – Albert over Damien, Damien over Susan, Marie over Damien

The following highlights four possible power imbalances that may have affected the way the story played out.

Positional Power

One of the key factors that worried me in my meeting with Damien was my belief that he lied. Marie had told me that she saw Damien in a room with Susan on their own earlier that day. He denied it. Why would he lie unless he had something to hide? This had a significant effect on the rest of the meeting – I lost faith in his honesty, which meant I had to doublethink his responses.

In hindsight, though, I wonder what I would have done in his situation. Here he was, in a meeting with the Deputy Principal, second in authority only to the Principal. The Line Manager of his Line Manager. And Damien's contract was coming up for renewal. I had Damien's future in my hands – an imbalance that is a recipe for careful, thoughtful survival thinking. Why admit to being in a room with Susan? Nothing happened because nothing is going on. It was just a friendly chat like he would have with any other student, it just happened to take place in an empty classroom. Why muddy the waters when a little white lie would stop him having to rely on the integrity of the Deputy Principal whom he hardly knew?

Although I had tried to remove the formality of the situation, moving round to the 'customer side of the desk', and was intending to be supportive and collegial, ultimately I was the boss. I had organised the meeting, the time it would take place, the agenda...I could not remove the reality of my position or Damien's perspective of the threatening nature of the meeting.

Personal and Experiential Power

To other members of staff Damien's persona was very strong. Although he was younger than Marie and she was his Line Manager, Damien appeared to have no concerns over her positional

power. He was a very confident operator. He was only in his second year, having come into teaching from industry. He had been a reasonably high-powered marketing executive in a big company in Sydney and he knew that Marie, on the other hand, had gone from school to uni to teaching. She lacked confidence: probably one of the reasons that she was a stickler for being organised – no surprises; she ridiculed herself for this describing herself as ‘anal-retentive’. I had supported her on a number of occasions in her interactions with staff and, on one occasion, she had broken down in tears at the bullying behaviour of another member of staff – she would not make a complaint and would not support an intervention on my part. There was a history. She had a number of problems managing her department which consisted of three men; the other two being almost 15 years older than she, more knowledgeable in the learning area, and passively resistant but professionally awkward. Her commitment to her work was unquestionable and I considered her to be one of the forward thinkers in the school. But, in hindsight, it is possible that there was a significant personal power imbalance between Damien and Marie that may have distorted her attempts to discuss the issue of Damien’s perceived relationship with Susan, a factor that I had not brought to my own attention.

Sexual Power

I recognise the political incorrectness of discussing this form of power relationship. However, it would be naïve to think that it doesn’t exist, and to pretend otherwise would be a negation of the aim of this research: to explore the nature of lived experience. This discussion of Sexual Power nearly didn’t appear in this paper due to its origins in the first draft of Damien’s perspective, which I referred to earlier. I initially discarded this draft as it seemed to infer guilt upon Damien and validate my actions [perhaps an example of the omnipotence of the author/researcher to hide/obscure]. When I realised this I decided against it; the aim of the fictive story was to generate alternative possibilities not confirm existing ones. Because of the discussion it opens up, however, this perspective is elaborated below. The alternate story starts just after Damien finds the note from me requesting a meeting.

Damien’s Story – Take 2 (The 1st Draft!)

*“Shit! Shit...shit...shit!” Damien quickly folds the note and puts it in his pocket before anybody else in the staffroom spots it. He checks around to see if anybody heard him. He registers that light feeling in the stomach that is brought on by the release of adrenalin. But there’s nobody to fight...and nowhere to run. **Shit. What does he want me for? Does he know? There’s been talk. Nothing’s going on. No he doesn’t know. He doesn’t. Shit.** He suddenly realises that he has been standing at his pigeonhole, reading nothing, doing nothing, thinking everything; like the Big Bang, his mental world suddenly dilates to include an environment. Classes begin in thirty minutes. He heads out past the assembling staff, the pace of his step precluding anything other than “Hi, Damien”. But, if anybody spoke, he never heard.*

“Les! I just got your note.”

"Oh. Hi, Damien," says Les. He hasn't made it to his office door yet and is still carrying his bag and laptop. Damien tries to read his face, unaware of the lack of colour in his own. Is it about Susan? Is it?

"Can you see me now?" says Damien.

"Not really, Damien. I have scheduled it so that Marie can be there as well."

"Does she need to be? Can't we just get it over with now?"

"Well Marie is your line manager, Damien..."

"I'll forego the right to have her there," he says.

*"No, Damien. I want her to hear what's being said." **Shit, shit, shit!** Damien heads off towards the staff room but detours out of the door towards his office. Marie isn't there, although he hadn't decided what he was going to say, if anything. **They've done it again! They're supposed to be my colleagues, my friends. That's a laugh. Running off to the Deputy. Shit! They're such a bunch of morons. She's a kid! I bet it's the Girls – the bitches! Shit!***

Damien is free first period. He waits outside his empty classroom catching sight of her as she is making her way to class. She sees him and redirects over to say hello. How are you this morning? Have you got a minute? We need to talk. Of course, she says and follows him into the classroom. She walks over to a desk and sits on top of it as Damien slides the door shut. He turns to face her after checking who had seen them. He knew this was not okay.

"I've got to go and see the Deputy," he says. Not really knowing how to say it – or what he is trying to say.

"What for?" she asks smiling, her bare shoulders hunched slightly forwards from the pressure of her outstretched arms pushing against the desktop.

"I think it's about you and me." He notices the smile run across her lips.

"What about you and me?" she asks.

"Someone's complained about us being friends. They think something's going on." He chokes out a laugh feigning the nonchalance of a young cavalier.

"Who? And about what?" She asks. Was there a slight tease in there, he wonders?

"I bet it's Dryden. You know what she's like. Cold. The ice-maiden. Isn't that what students call her?" She smiles at him.

*"Nothing's happened," she says. "Don't worry about it." **Like last year. But this is different. Steph is firm and Les plays by the rules. He'll follow it.***

*"Yeh. Don't worry. I'll fill you in on it later. I just wanted to warn you what was going on," he says. **Who am I kidding? She doesn't get it.***

It was my daughter, on reading this draft, who raised the significance of Susan's actions. Christa picked up on Susan's smile: "Hmmm. You can see who's got the power there!" At the time that I wrote this section of the story I had simply meant to portray an innocence, a lack of understanding of the danger of these rumours for Damien: read the last line. But this opened up another perspective building upon Grace's advice to Rick: "She's only just finding out she's a woman," (Braithwaite, 1959, p112). It occurred to me that there was also the possibility that Susan, like Pamela, was reacting to "the first real man she's met" (Braithwaite, 1959, p112) under the influence of her own developing womanhood with a power and confusion that she may have been unaware of.

Damien may have been struggling with the same observations and feelings that Rick describes, but with less control over his emotions and their effect on his ability to make professional decisions. Deborah Tannen suggests that the attraction men feel towards females produces a fear that "results from the loss of control entailed by attraction" (Tannen, 1994, p249), and many researchers have asserted the negative effect that emotions have on making rational decisions (Bohm, 1994; Damasio, 1994; Ford & Ford, 1987).

Provocatively, Deborah Tannen provides a controversial perspective describing how women can use an understanding of their sexual power to their advantage.

"Another physician told me that when she placed an advertisement that said 'Physician seeking office assistant,' one after another young woman appeared wearing low-cut blouses and minute skirts. When they discovered that the physician interviewing them was female, they became uncomfortable, and during the interviews tugged at the necks of their blouses and hems of their skirts, trying to cover themselves up. She learned to avoid this embarrassing situation by advertising 'Woman physician seeks office assistant.'" (Tannen, 1994, p271)

The young women applying for this position displayed an understanding of the power of their own attractiveness. While I am not proposing that this was necessarily the situation with Susan, a multiple perspectival approach recognises this as a possibility.

How does the preceding discussion affect your previous thoughts about the power relationships that may have been impacting on the story I have described? How is your clarity on the issues affected? Or is it unchanged?

On Privileging Perspectives

Although my previous experiences had made me wary of Marie's concerns about Damien's relationship with Susan, she was a member of the powerful 'Girl's Table', it seems that I tended to err on the side of a critical feminist concern about imbalanced power relationships. This was the tack with which Marie had approached me. She was concerned that Damien was either unaware of, or unconcerned about, the maintenance of professional distance between students and teachers. She drew my attention to a similar concern the year before and spoke about his being a 'grown man' and the student being a 'young girl'. The thought had occurred to me that it was Marie who was emphasising the sexual nature of the relationship, an emphasis that originated perhaps from a critical feminist concern for power imbalances between males and females. Marie's personal history had included a broken marriage to an abusive husband. She had been left to bring up a child as a single parent and had somehow maintained her career. Although Marie had since remarried and, appeared to be very happy, it is possible that negative life experiences had a distorting effect in this case.

It seems to me that a strong critical feminist perspective, unbalanced by a moderating influence, had a significant impact on the way the story unfolded. Despite my attempts to ensure that I didn't decide on a solution before I met with Damien, my journal entry highlights key questions I had asked myself prior to the meeting, suggesting that I had unwittingly become an advocate for Marie's narrow concerns. Phronesis requires a multi-perspectival view, and interestingly, feminist theory itself offers an alternative perspective that could have helped in addressing this issue: Gilligan's dimensions of female moral development. This is discussed below.

On Moral perspectives in decision-making

But isn't this a question of basic morality? Do you intuitively feel there is something wrong in this line of investigation? What do your moral principles advise you to do...?

A second lesson for me originated through an understanding of different perspectives on moral development. There appears to be a clear distinction between the way the two women, Marie and Grace, responded to the situation of the relationships between Damien and Susan, and Rick and Pamela. Marie would appear to have acted out of a Kohlbergian framework of moral development; one based on principles of justice and of rights. On the other hand, Grace's advice to Rick Braithwaite originates from a moral perspective more in line with Carol Gilligan's framework that recognises the centrality of relationships through a focus on responsiveness and care (Plessner Lyons, 1988).

Grace's interpretation of the issue was constructed from a perspective of trust. Grace had confidence in Rick's professionalism. She trusted him to look after Pamela's welfare and not take advantage of her obvious feelings for him. She recognised the human-ness of the situation and the reasoning behind Pamela's attraction to Rick. She was supportive of him and understanding of the emotions involved on the part of both Rick and Pamela. Her advice displays a very strong sense of an ethic of care, one concerned for all involved and one responsive to individual needs and concerns.

Marie, on the other hand, interpreted the situation through a lens of distrust. She seemed to have no faith in Damien's ability to handle the situation in a professional manner. If anything she doubted Damien's motives. She was concerned with protecting Susan's rights and bringing Damien to justice – a justice meted out by the Deputy. It could be argued that Marie's decision-making was informed by a Kohlbergian focus on 'principles' and 'impartial' fairness alongside a critical feminist concern with power relationships.

Gilligan's feminist notions of responsiveness and an ethic of care could have provided a moral dialectic to the judgemental nature of Marie's decision-making. The impartial fairness referent through which Marie seems to have viewed the incident does have validity but is derived from assumptions of separation. An alternative perspective, derived from Gilligan's research recognises life as 'dependent on connection' (Gilligan, 1982), recognises the interdependent relationships of Damien, Susan and Marie. Similarly, Marie's critical feminist concerns with power relationships could have been addressed using an approach that was responsive to the needs and concerns of all involved, that approached the issue with an attitude of caring for others. It seems that a leader who is concerned only with Kohlbergian notions of justice, fairness and rights, or with Gilligan's notions of response and an ethic of care, is acting out of a perspective that disregards the idea of moral positioning and the importance of moral relativity and situational morality.

The concept of moral relativity arises from the assumptions underlying Ricoeur's notion of Critical Phronesis. As I have shown above, Ricoeur has acknowledged that we must come to terms with the alternative moral conceptions of others'. Alasdair McIntyre has argued that moral consciousness is rooted in "...one's own particular historicity," (Wall, 2003, p321) and decision-making is, therefore, guided by our histories. This echoes Ernst von Glaserfeld's 'radical' modifications to constructivism asserting our inability to 'know' the 'truth'. Further, Jurgen Habermas has argued that our actions are guided by our orienting interests (1978): a technical interest leads towards teleological actions that treat others as objects to be manipulated in order to

achieve desired ends whereas a practical interest leads towards communicative actions intended to facilitate consensual understanding. In this context judgements are based on different criteria: teleological actions are judged according to their effectiveness, whereas communicative actions are judged according to notions of truth, and rightness (Outhwaite, 1996). Moral relativity acknowledges the differing historical perspectives that inform decision-making and the relativity of a moral decision to the lived experience of each individual.

Situational morality, on the other hand, recognises the impact of the context within which moral decisions must be made. With everything the same except for one factor, the context may lead to an alternative moral decision: situational morality. Context is not restricted to the present; time itself is a pertinent dimension because of its centrality to aims and goals. My own 'moral project' muddied the waters around the issue of 'A Story of Our Times'. Throughout the year I had worked to bring about pedagogical change, particularly with respect to teacher-student relationships. There was a 'doing it to them' understanding of education that permeated both the approaches of the staff and the structures within the school. Damien's approach to dealing with students was very personable, focused on developing good relationships. He was a younger member of staff going against the norm. I wanted him to be successful and his approach to students to become more general. He provided a concrete example of what I was trying to bring about – my moral project. In this situation, as perhaps in all situations, there was a question of the greater good. Should I support Marie, as Line Manager, in her efforts to control Damien's interactions with students, or Damien in his (unintentional) modelling of best practice?

I found myself weighing up my need to protect Damien's approach to student relationships (my moral project) against Marie's need to manage the behaviour of a member of her department. My initial aim was to look after the interests of all. I had decided to let the meeting with Damien tell me what to do. During the meeting, however, when I 'caught' Damien in a lie, I switched from an approach informed by an ethic of care (Gilligan) to one based on 'impartial' principles (Kohlberg). I reacted to Damien's lie by losing my sense of our interdependence and cognitively alienating him from our 'group' – a 'punishment' perhaps for his deliberate lie? It never occurred to me that there might be another reason for him to do so. The result was a 'resolution' with which both Damien and I were unhappy.

Phronesis, whichever interpretation one prefers to consult, is ultimately a call for moral action. Arguments can always be made to justify competing positions; this is the origin of dilemmas. Nussbaum has demonstrated this using the story of Antigone and Creon to show that conflicting moral actions can be justified from the (narrow) frame of reference of each actor (Wall, 2003). However distasteful it might seem, postmodernist sensitivities combined with the notions of situational morality, moral relativity and von Glaserfeld's Radical Constructivism support the deconstruction of simplistic moral hierarchies making decision-making considerably more complex. Phronesis provides the practicing leader with a de-focusing lens through which to achieve a more inclusive understanding of morality that can inform them in their role as decision-makers.

A STORY OF OUR TIMES – A CONCLUSION?

So now, after walking back through the incident of Damien's relationship with Susan, what, if anything has changed? How would I approach a situation like this in the future? Are there any suggestions here for the practising leader?

With the benefit of richer understandings I find myself questioning my handling of Damien's relationship with Susan. Did I adhere too closely to a critical feminist perspective that seems to have underpinned Marie's concerns over power relationships? Should I *really* have been surprised at Damien's omissions – assuming Marie's version of the events was accurate? After all, there was a definite power relationship between Damien and I, the Deputy Principal, the Line Manager to his Line Manager. Why did my initial approach, one that was sensitive to the 'people-ness' of the situation, disappear during our meeting? Somehow I flicked from a moral approach based upon supporting all parties to one of ensuring Damien ceased his relationship with the student. My, initially, more open approach to the issue collapsed under the weight of my focus on Damien's lie, in much the same way as quantum waves collapse to discrete particles when observed by physicists. Had I been more sensitive to Damien's situation and his perspective of my 'power' would I have been able to maintain the quantum blur of uncertainty and modify my reaction to his lie?

This form of research has facilitated a powerful reformulation of my lived experience. The process drew my attention to a range of emotional factors that may have been in play both on my part and that of the others. Whereas I'd had trouble seeing another perspective to begin with, now I am faced with a number of realisations whose omission from my original understanding may have seriously impacted my approach to resolving the issue. School Leaders are faced with the time-hungry, energy-draining responsibility of making daily decisions that can have significant effects on the actors in the scene. Wiser judgements-in-action can be made using understandings gained from this research; Phronesis in general, and Critical and Poetic Phronesis are powerful tools for the practicing leader and can provide a practical and informative referent for the practicing leader interested in transformational processes.

I began this paper by suggesting that current models of leadership are failing in the postmodern world. I argued a need to embed a moral dimension within leadership practices. I suggested that transformational learning offers a powerful perspective through which to view leadership. And I reaffirmed the need to ensure the voice of professional practice is part of the deliberations. The analysis of 'A Story of Our Times' has provided a strong argument to support each of these claims while proposing two powerful referents to assist those interested in developing their leadership practice. The process of rewriting my history has facilitated a personal transformation that should improve both my professional practice and my approach to the other.

Transformational learning hits at the very heart of who we are. A Phronetic approach to including others is both "...unsettling and self-disruptive" (Wall, 2003, p325). It seems to me that leadership informed by deeper, wider and more inclusive understandings must be imbued with courage, the courage of conviction, albeit a courage that seeks inclusivity with a brash lack of concern for one's own existing formulations: the poetic recreation of the self *is* an unsettling and self-disruptive task. But then real learning is a blindfolded step along the edge of a precipice where we stand upon the safe ground of yesterday's knowledge and peer out at the vast expanse of tomorrow's.

Got to let go of the things that keep you tethered
Take your place with grace
and then be on your way

(Cockburn, 1991)

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ⁱ Sims is a popular computer simulation game in which the player builds families out of characters that they have 'created'. Players control the actions of the characters as if they were alive.