

Practice & Potential: A Heuristic Inquiry into the potential of poetry for the reflexive coaching practitioner

Jacki McCartney

Wells, UK, jacki.mccartney@syat.com

Abstract

A capability mind set which includes reflexivity enhances the competency frameworks promoted by the professional associations with their attention to self-awareness, self-insight and personal accountability. Reflexivity is a core enabler of ethical coaching practice and personal and professional growth. However a clear appreciation of the term, its application, its benefits and its practice emerges as a potential misconception. The benefits of writing of poetry are typically understood within related helping professions such as psychotherapy and this article explores a possible relationship regarding the potential of poetry in supporting reflexive engagement for the professional coaching practitioner.

Keywords: coaching, reflexivity, poetry, Heuristic Inquiry

Introduction

As an Executive Coach working within the ambiguity and complexity of the twenty-first century knowledge economy, I appreciate that organisations and senior executives face unrelenting demands to access ways of knowing that deliver results in a global market (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). As a Systemic Transformational Coach, whose primary role is to catalyse the reflexive practice of his/her coachees, I acknowledge a core coaching competency is self-awareness supported by a ground rule of practicing upon self before applying to coachees (Iordanou, Hawley & Iordanou, 2017; Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2014, Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Writing poetry as part of my professional learning logs lead me to note that it offered more than just reflective learning. Poetry appeared to support emotional catharsis and indeed to facilitate insight and communication with others. Against this backdrop, I find myself curious as to the potential role of poetry in support of engagement in reflexivity as part of the development of professional coaching practice.

A considerable body of literature from a wide variety of disciplines endorses the value of emotional expression through writing, specifically in therapeutic (Haertl, 2014; Baikie & Wilhelm, 2005; Baker & Mazza, 2004), education (Wall, Rosetti, Scott & Bloomfield, 2017) and social care (Canham & Satyamurthi, 2003) settings. If the experience of creative writing in interdisciplinary settings is extended to the world of the executive coach, then potential opportunities for exploring the potential of writing poetry in support of development and emotional wellbeing emerge (Wall *et al.*, 2017; Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Cox *et al.*, 2014; Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009). As my study is specifically interested in the writing of poetry in supporting engagement in reflexivity as part of the development of professional coaching practice, drawing upon the experience of other modalities expands opportunities for knowledge-sharing and learning (Grisoni, 2017; Cox *et al.*, 2014; Mezirow, 2009; Kegan, 2009). Reflection and reflexivity are regarded as essential enablers of professional



development in the complex business of being a coach, with its demands upon the human aspects of the coach as a professional and human being (Iordanou et al., 2017; Bachkirova, 2016). Coaching may be considered as a dynamic process whereby the coach is supporting the coachee to embrace reflexivity in real time as they explore the coachee's lived experience, unconscious or practical limits to growth including established belief systems, influence(s) and options going forward (Iordanou et al., 2017; Cunliffe, 2002). The value of the coach practitioner engaging with reflexive practice is rooted in concerns for awareness and accountability for self, whilst addressing potential limitations to personal growth, considering options and choices and proactively optimising supervision (Bachkirova, 2016; Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015). It appears that from a developmental coaching perspective, poetry might offer a route into reframing the conscious and exploring the unconscious, whether by creating personal verse or reading the poetic work of others (Grisoni, 2017; Bachkirova, Jackson, Gannon, Iordanou & Myers, 2017; Canham 2006; Whyte, 1994). Poetry affords a platform for interpretation and sensemaking, transformation and choice (Grisoni, 2017; Morgan, 2010; Canham, 2003; Whyte, 1994). Additionally, poetry can facilitate the identification and unlearning of established patterns and limits to growth and redefining a way of being in role, in team, in the organisation and the wider community (Grisoni, 2017; Hawkins, 2015; Morgan, 2010).

This study, embracing a Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) methodology, considers the experience of seven co-researchers who were invited to review their own experience of self-coaching and self-leadership (Cunha, Pacheco, Castanheira & Rego, 2015) in order to explore how this impacted upon personal development and coaching practice (Bachkirova, 2016). As the primary methodology, Heuristic Inquiry (Moustakas, 1990) is supported by a Heuristic Self Search Inquiry, (Sela-Smith, 2002) attending to poetry written by the researcher in a time limited sphere.

Methodology

Qualitative research with its orientation towards people, human experience and the world in which we live, appeared congruent with a research question rooted in similar considerations (Patton, 2014). Phenomenology with its orientation towards exploring how human beings perceive, construct, interpret and make sense of lived experience to reveal a deeper sense of essence and meaning supported my research interest. With Heuristic Inquiry (HI – Moustakas, 1990) as the primary methodology supporting my research question the focus was upon capturing the essence of the lived experience of those taking part (Moustakas, 1990).

As a methodology in the phenomenological tradition, HI supports an aspiration to make a contribution to the coaching profession since like coaching, HI benefits from the researcher being conscious of personal thoughts, actions, feelings and behaviour, during and post practice (Bachkirova, 2016). Additionally, HI is concerned with the development of the researcher as a participant within the research process implying reflexive consideration of and accountability for self throughout. Reflexivity might be considered the illumination, revelation and distillation of self within an experience. Such consideration supports self-awareness, insight, learning, growth and wellbeing – each a vital principle within coaching and HI (Wall *et al.*, 2017; Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Bachkirova, 2016, Moustakas, 1994).

One of the criticisms levied at HI, is the ambiguity of the researcher role whether as researcher or as participant and the challenges which this might present in distilling interest and focus. Such criticism attends to the nature and degree of personal transformation available to the researcher arising from a tension in roles throughout the HI process



(Ozertugrul, 2015). To address this concern and also reflecting my own interest to directly and unambiguously embrace my experience, emotions and development reflected in my poetry, I chose to embrace Heuristic Self Search Inquiry (HSSI - Sela-Smith, 2002). Such an approach brought two additional benefits –the opportunity to distinguish between myself as a reflexive researcher and myself as an active participant and the opportunity to make a methodological contribution through the interweaving of data analysis from each methodology into emergent findings and ultimately a cohesive whole. Such an approach reflected an up-to-date appreciation of the intersubjectivity of self as a researcher with participants and as a unique and distinct participant within the research process (Cunliffe, 2016). Whilst HI and HSSI are typically presented as linear processes, in reality each was highly dynamic, recursive and challenging throughout.

Each CR received a formal invitation to attend a voluntary workshop focused upon exploring what constitutes poetry and to participate in a two-stage process:

- A one-to-one in-depth, semi-structured 90-minute interview to explore individual approaches to reflexive practice and to invite CRs to engage with the creation of poetry as a means of reflexive practice over a 2/3-month period to explore the impact on personal development and coaching practice.
- A final one-to-one in-depth, semi-structured 90-minute interview to explore CRs' experience and to consider any emergent issues from the first interview and/or a voluntary poetry creation workshop.

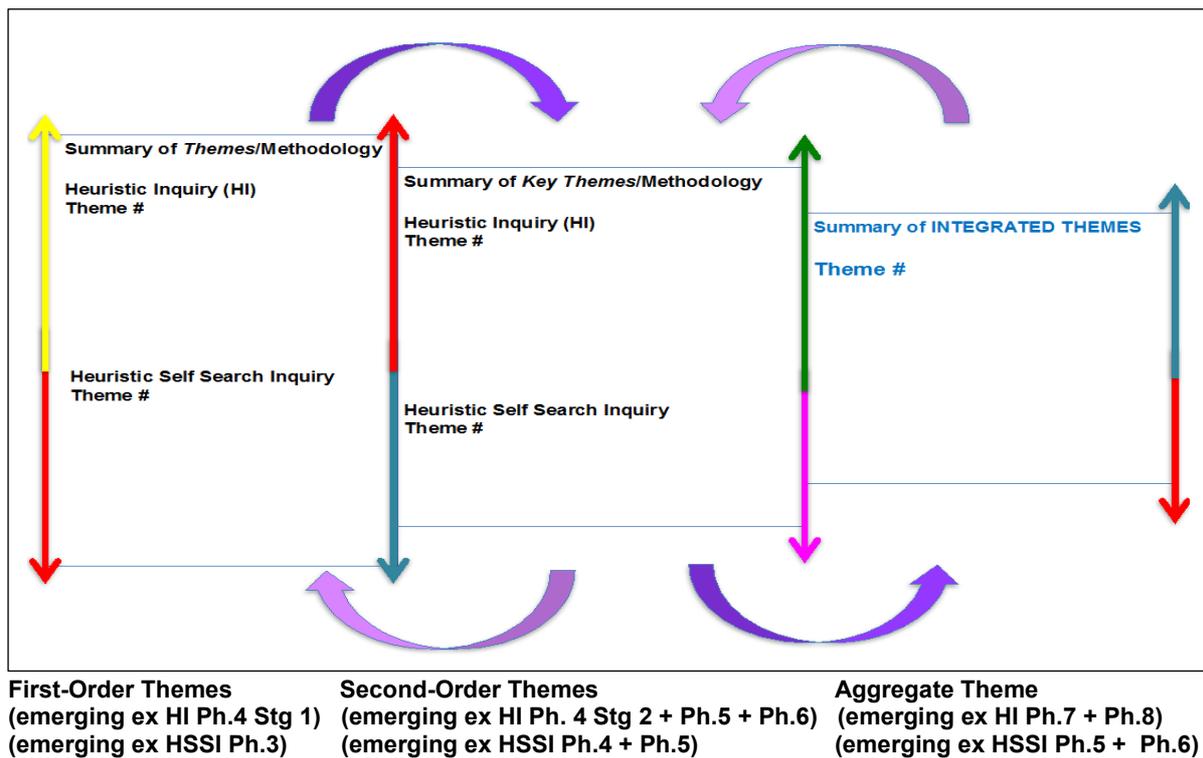
As part of the HI process, CRs, each assigned a gender specific pseudonym to support anonymity, were invited to embrace a poetic writing task that included the opportunity to embrace reflexivity as a process and to write poetry as an associated task. Critically, in accordance with an HI approach, the researcher expressed an interest that focuses upon the essence of each co-researcher's experience as opposed to any judgement with respect to poetic musings or reflexive practice (Moustakas, 1990).

HI data analysis was embraced using thematic analysis, which supported an inductive and creative approach to the decomposition, reconstruction and reframing of CR data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2014). Reviewing and interpreting CR transcriptions sought to identify patterns, amongst the key messages and observations within individual CR interviews, which were in turn cross-referenced with those from other CRs. Mind mapping, with notes based upon earlier coding and word clouds enabled the dynamic discovery of '*important patterns, themes and interrelationships*' (Patton, 2002, p.41). A significant amount of data emerged from HI, HSSI and my reflexive diary so considerations of disciplined, repeatable data organisation, supported by a methodical approach to each data source were vital for rigour, integrity and transparency.

Immersion into my CR data followed HI principles, extended by analysis of my poetry following HSSI principles. Such a disciplined and recursive approach supported incubation of the data and the identification of unique themes (first-order) within each methodology, which were individually explored through four specific lenses to emerge from my HSSI data analysis (Cunha *et al.*, 2015). This brought forth additional perspectives and insights which lead to the development of key themes (second-order) within each methodology (Cunha *et al.*, 2015). Weaving different strands of knowledge together or '*plaiting*' (Sale, 2016, p.220) as a combined whole supported the development of a set of integrated (aggregate) themes (Cunha *et al.*, 2015).



Diagram 1: Integrating HI & HSSI processes & themes



A non-linear and recursive process such as either HI or HSSI is individually messy and collectively stressful, so framing the emergent themes within the context of responding to the research question emerged as a vital consideration at every stage of the data analysis process. Embracing reflexivity throughout was vital to the integrity and trustworthiness of the research and myself as a researcher. Acknowledgement of the important role of my subconscious and conscious processes of self-dialogue trusting that which is tacitly known and intuitively embraced and protecting emergent thoughts and ideas at every stage of the HI and the HSSI process, was vital, given the dynamic nature of the engagement (Polyani, 1964). Similarly, embracing considerations of time and space, revisiting my research question whilst sustaining and retaining the integrity of my worldview and my philosophical paradigm impacted at every stage of the potential emergence of the unknown within the context of emergent knowledge. Working with the dynamic relationship and interplay between and amongst these elements was highlighted and reflected in the integrated process and outcomes (Cunliffe, 2016). My creative uses of tables, diagrams and colour supported the management and synthesis of data, the integration of thinking and the enrichment of my research process whilst reflecting the totality of my personal and professional being.

Findings

A wealth of data emerged from interviews, interview transcriptions, email exchanges, the cancellation of the poetic workshop, my HSSI poetry considerations and my reflexive practice (table 2). From this data three integrated themes emerged which are explained in this section.



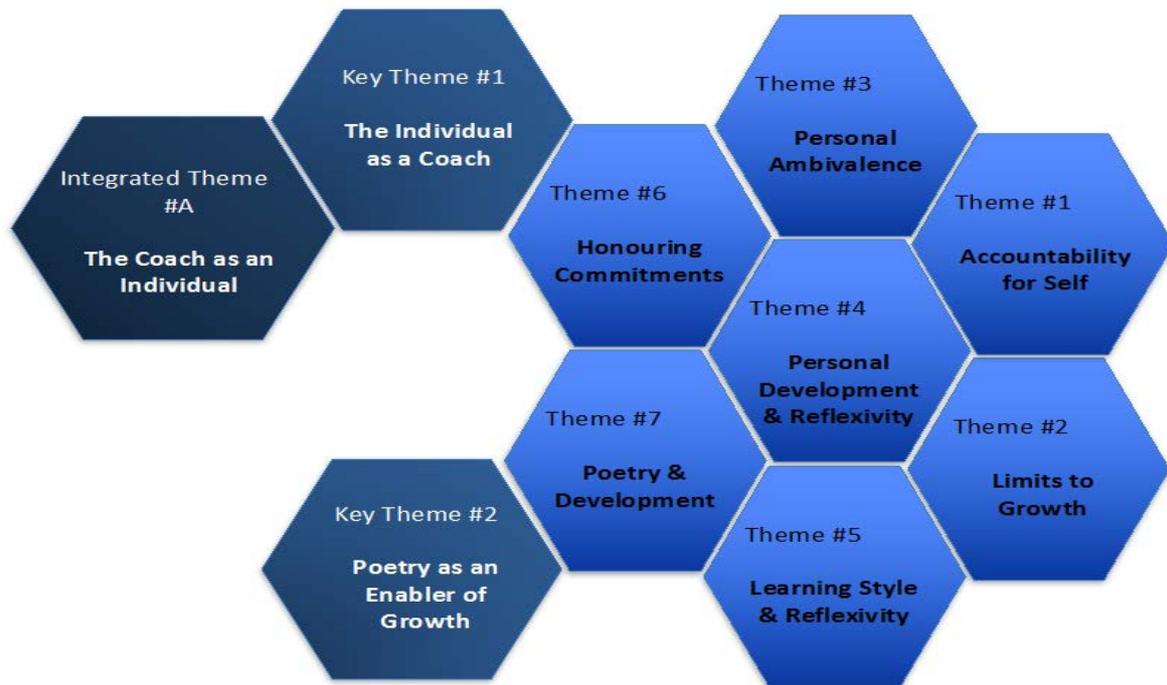
Table 1: Data Sources

Heuristic Inquiry (HI) –	JMM Reflexive Practice	Heuristic Self Search Inquiry
CR data only		(HSSI) - JMM data only
CR Interviews x 14 (7 CRs x 90 minutes x 2 interviews each) (Typically 9 pages of A4 per interview)	1st round reflexive logs x 14 (each log my reflexive response to individual interview or transcription)	JMM Anthologies x 3 (Titles x 101) (Chapters x 6)
Integrated Summary of above	Integrated Summary of above	Integrated Summary of above
Transcriptions x 14 (21 hours of material)	2nd round interviews x 14 (each log my reflexive response to individual interview or transcription)	Poems #101 Verses #459 Words #11515
Integrated Summary of above	Integrated Summary of above	Integrated Summary of above

The Coach as an Individual emerges as one of the integrated themes from my HI and HSSI research and considers the individual coach’s personal accountabilities for personal and professional standards within a complex helping and unregulated profession (Iordanou *et al*, 2017; Bachkirova, 2016). This integrated theme draws upon first and second-order themes to emerge from my HI and HSSI data as reflected in diagram 3. This integrated theme attends to personal and professional growth, enrichment of a professional capability mindset drawing upon reflexive capability, experience and knowledge with personal accountability for self-care, learning and growth (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Bachkirova, 2015; Cox *et al.*, 2014). The theme evolves from consideration of the individuality of the coach and the responsibilities/professional accountabilities which this carries in terms of personal being, personal development and personal growth as a coach practitioner.



Diagram 2: The Territory of the Coach as an Individual theme



Many of my CRs are carrying multiple professional identities, such as head of department or business owner alongside that of coach, which may be relevant for personal accountability, wellbeing and development (Petherick, 2016). There may be a gap between an ideal model of coaching as a profession in which people have high levels of self-awareness, a duty of self-care and development and a clear sense of personal and professional identity versus a complex reality in which people are juggling multiple roles, in a time-pressured, emotionally challenging, nuanced reality of '*accelerated madness*' (Gina). It is within such a reality that the importance of the coach looking after self and holding self to account appears vital. Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) suggest making sense of personal complexity is driven by a need for plausibility and rationality and is key in shaping identity and personal narrative since it enables people to realise their role, contribution, position and uniqueness in a world of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The potential for embracing a strategic and considered approach to development in support of self-leadership and ethical coaching practice emerges as an important aspect of the individual coach's professional and personal practice. Hawkins and Smith (2010) position supervision as a key enabler of personal professional development, however the purpose and experience of supervision was varied, with some regarding reflexivity as "*absolutely about supervision*" (Faye). Many CRs, particularly those who are self-employed, reflected an opportunistic, incremental, self-directed approach to development with Katie indicating "*a lot of the learning that I do is fast ... quick... when I have got a minute, I am using social media to find something of interest*".

At a tactical level, assimilation of reflexive practice as an ongoing part of the coach's personal and professional way of being might support and inform self-discovery and self-leadership. Writing, creatively and poetically, is evidenced as offering potential to reconcile day to day personal dilemmas alongside emotional and relational needs (Whyte, 1994) – the



challenge appears to lie with individuals prioritising time and space for self to promote personal wellbeing and enable the subconscious to come to the fore. This in turn requires self-confidence, curiosity and a focus upon growth.

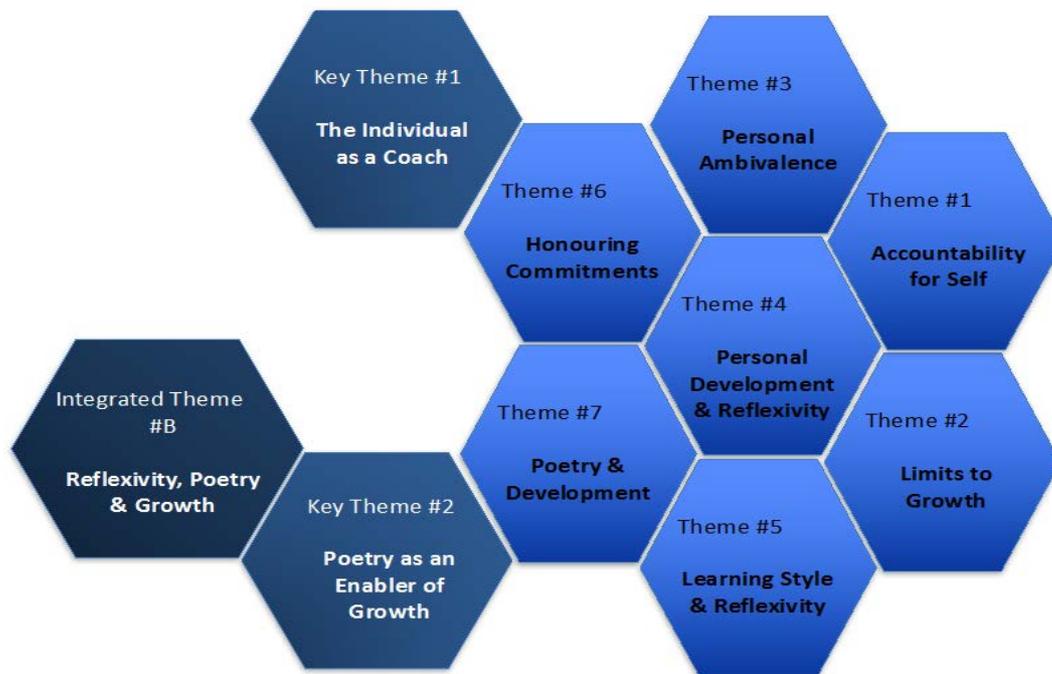
All my CRs were initially highly motivated to engage with the poetic writing task but the 'busyness' of personal and professional life impacted upon self-directed choice whether to engage and in what form (Cox *et al.*, 2014). Polly was typical when she indicated "*I'm going to say that I don't find time to do it (reflexivity) I would like to find time to put things down on paper*".

As a researcher, I found myself curious to understand the tension between agreeing in principle to do something and honouring this agreement. As a coach, in such circumstances, we might typically challenge or explore further to garner learning for both parties but as a researcher in a voluntary research process where the CR has the opportunity to withdraw at any point, a key difference emerges in role and power. Writing in any form demands discipline, supported by a sense of safety, self-confidence and non-judgement (Davidson & Schwarz, 2011). Despite the emphasis of my research and curiosity attending to the essence of individual experience in writing poetry in support of personal reflexive practice and personal development and growth, for the majority of my CRs, such assurance did not overcome other priorities or perhaps support the challenge of doing something new or differently (Davidson & Schwarz, 2011). Katie expressed a sentiment which might resonate with many, stating that "*If I have to do stuff that I don't like, that's not my happy place.*" If coaching is about learning and learning carries its own growth pains, then a potential limitation to growth emerges (Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009; Senge, 1990). It is possible that in the face of '*a disruptive form of writing*' (Grisoni & Page, 2015, p.109), people despite their best intentions, in the reality of the task, encountered some sort of resistance. As a researcher, I respect the choice of individual CRs and believe it draws focus upon the individuality of the coach, in being and approach, whilst highlighting notions of personal accountability and growth alongside the importance of supervision. It is for the individual coach to hold self to account for personal and professional development, praxis of reflexivity, alongside considerations of self-deception, wellbeing and growth (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Wall *et al.*, 2017; Bachkirova, 2016).

Reflexivity, Poetry & Growth similarly emerges as an integrated theme from my HI and HSSI research and considers a potential relationship between poetry and reflexivity, bringing forth a potential contribution to personal development and growth, whilst seeking to contribute to professional coaching practice. This integrated theme draws upon first and second-order themes to emerge from my HI and HSSI data as demonstrated in diagram 4. This integrated theme reflects an inherent assumption as to the role of reflexivity in enhancing self-awareness as part of personal and professional development.



Diagram 3: The territory of the Reflexivity, Poetry & Growth theme



My CR interviews revealed an appreciation of the term ‘reflexivity’ but highlighted a lack of coherence in terms of definition and importance, the relationship with reflection or coherent and consistent application and practice. Lucas summed up these sentiments, indicating *“I don’t really know what you mean by reflexivity. But certainly, reflection is a crucial part of my experience”*

The importance of reflexive practice within coaching is typically positioned by academics as an enabler of ethical maturity and growth so a lack of coherence and differentiation carries potential consequences for growth, application and practice (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Bachkirova, 2016; Mezirow, 2009; Kegan, 2009).

Writing poetry starts with observation and connectivity, attending to relationships with self and the outer world. Being open and receptive supports deep reflection and sensitivity to self, supported by intense scrutiny and personal challenge as to where the emotion is coming from internally and what has triggered the emotion externally, prior to finding the words that do justice to the observations and sentiments (Briggs, 2012; Canham & Satyamurthi, 2003). My CRs’ interest in poetry appears focused upon the sensemaking opportunity identified by Morgan (2010), with an intuitive perception of benefits to the reader as *“help to see the brighter side”* (Charles) or as for Gina, forging connections over the generations (Windle, 1994): *“I didn’t know my great grandfather but my grandmother ... keeps citing him.”* Some CRs were using the poetic works of others as *“a starting point”* for coach development. Unifying the reflexive process with the poetic process or other form of personally selected creative expression emerges as an opportunity for a richer, nuanced consideration of and learning about self and self in relation to others which reflects the unique voice of the author.

Jade noted the development opportunities afforded by writing poetry in several areas, including personal development *“it was making sense of what was going on for me”*,



relationship development *“poetry ...can be just fun ... it’s cemented another web of connections between us”* and coachee development *“I can imagine writing a poem to my client ... and I know she would...receive it in the spirit that I sent it.”*

Cox *et al.* (2014) suggest coaching offers potential, with a focus upon learning, relationships, communication and feedback; it appears that poetry in support of reflexivity may afford similar opportunity. Like coaching, development, and growth, reflexivity and creative expression may not always be comfortable since each explores and reveals the unknown and the unfamiliar (Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009; Canham 2003). As an arts-based approach, using poetry with clients carries implications for professional identity (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) with the potential risk of being perceived as *“flaky”* (Jade), since *‘poetry is its own little engine of complex meanings’* (Morgan, 2010, p.12). Poetry, like coaching may reveal and challenge the tension between the rational and the emotional in organisational life and the coachee, bringing opportunity and responsibility to the professional coach to support through a personal appreciation of preference, options and choices (Bachkirova & Cox, 2007; Whyte, 1994).

Cunha *et al.*, (2015, p.17) suggest *‘conducting ... reflexive work is no simple task’* and is challenging and emotional. To address such concerns, my CRs appear to demonstrate self-knowledge and self-awareness whilst developing strategies for self-management that may be viewed as acceptance or perhaps a defence against the pain and challenge of personal change, even when known to be harmful to self (Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009; Sela-Smith, online). For coaches, such awareness but lack of attention may be a form of self-deception if considering potential implication(s) for self and one’s practice, since *‘this is also what coaching practitioners aim to achieve for their clients in relation to their life and practice’* (Bachkirova, 2015, p.145). Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) highlight the importance of self-identity within the construction of sensible personal narrative and within this context, tensions might be detected when considering CR data. This might include denial, rationalisation or acceptance of personal discomfort and challenge as part of one’s narrative or denying one’s own capability to address, heal or learn from such engagement, as highlighted by various CRs. If attending to self, such ideas may offer opportunities for personal development (Bachkirova, 2016).

For those CRs such as Gina, who used this research to engage reflexively with themselves and their practice, through poetry or some form of creative expression, it brought forth individual awareness whereby *“Writing in a way is one way to connect to ‘what am I feeling ...’”* (Haertl, 2014; Mazza, 2006). Gina’s personal observation reflects reflexive consideration with the potential for transformative change (Kegan, 2009).

Similarly, Jade wrote a poem about a specific lived experience in May: *“where I was in the pain of the emotional experience.”* Revisiting the poem in July, Jade was *“writing more from a distance – I could see myself in this situation as opposed to being inside it.”* For Jade, such an approach appears to have afforded perspective and insight, whilst writing and when revisiting later and notes the power of the unconscious, commenting, *“that was captured almost presciently in the poem”*. For Jade, poetry forges links between *“imagination and intuition”* and between people as she shared poetic examples rooted in family, friends, and clients supporting connection, feedback and communication whilst deepening relationships.

In contrast, Polly, struggling with the form and structure of poetry found *“I was shooting myself back to schooling”* and whilst acknowledging *“that in itself is saying something”*, her experience appeared to be different. *“None of it was particularly new”* nor the reflective space particularly desirable as she weighed up the challenge and decided *“I don’t need this”* since *“it wasn’t deepening either personal reflectiveness or thoughts about the client”*



situation.” Polly’s experience highlights notions of expectations regarding the task and process of writing poetry which upon exploration, she perceived “*to be the form of poetry.*” Polly concluded “*free hand ... feels much more comfortable*”, specifically, “*writing a story or an essay*” or “*pictures*”.

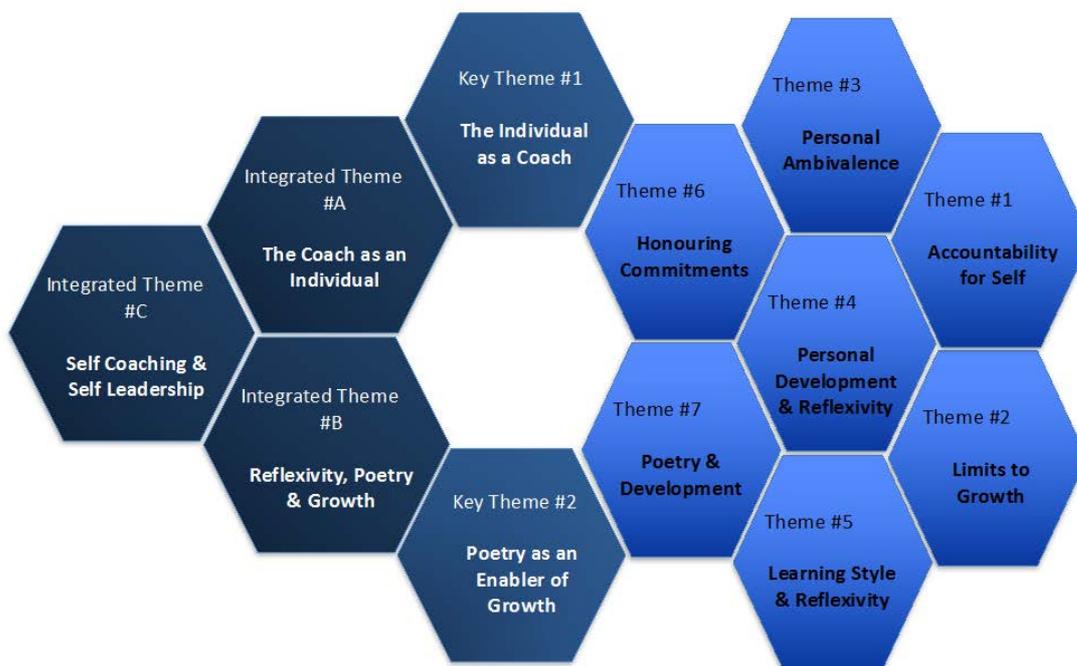
Similarly, Canham (2003, p.124) proposes poetry as a ‘*revelation*’, implying that the poetic journey may not always be comfortable as it reveals and explores the unknown and unfamiliar, which may in turn generate an emotional response for the poet and the audience.

My research reveals that creative expression supports reflexive practice by acting as a bridge between the subjective and the objective; the intangible and the tangible.

Self-coaching and Self-Leadership emerges as the final integrated theme from my HI and HSSI research and attends to the value in understanding, appreciating and respecting self as an individual in support of personal growth and professional practice. This integrated theme draws upon first and second-order themes to emerge from my HI and HSSI data as demonstrated in diagram 5. This integrated theme speaks to the importance of prioritising self, based upon a postmodernist worldview as reflected in diagram 5 and expressed by Jade:

I am here in service of you; to do that I must be aware that my first responsibility is to be in as great a service of myself as a whole person as I can.

Diagram 4: The territory of the Self-Coaching and Self-Leadership theme



Polly, reflecting the curiosity of many of the CRs, noted

Every time I come into contact with another, I am using the experience to consciously ... shift and to change and to question ...



considers the possibility and potential for the coach to move beyond reflective engagement as an individual practice or during supervision and to use poetry as a reflexive vehicle to integrate experience, reflection and emotional response, supporting personal growth.

Wall *et al.* (2017), Bachkirova (2016) and Sela-Smith (2016) highlight the importance of self-care in supporting psychological and physical wellbeing and sustaining/ improving the quality of coaching practice. Supervision is typically the acknowledged means for addressing issues of understanding, development and wellbeing; however, with apparently variable uptake and practice, accountability for self and quality of practice starts with self (Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Given the important role of the coach in supporting coachee reflexivity and of the coach practising for self as part of professional coaching practice, holding self to account carries weight (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Cox *et al.*, 2014). My data indicates there is not a prescribed, 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to the self-care of a coach, but rather an urgent recommendation to engage with self-care, however challenging it may be in terms of time, space or content to heal, develop and grow in support of personal wellbeing and professional coaching practice (Bachkirova, 2016). Nevertheless, it falls to the individual to take responsibility and accountability for optimisation of learning, managing personal limits to growth and managing personal health and wellbeing to optimise personal practice between supervision sessions.

If a coach wishes to maximise the investment in supervision, and subject to his/her contracting approach (Hawkins & Smith, 2006), then reflecting upon work and experience between sessions and considering such experience at a deeper, reflexive level, might support supervision preparation. Such self-leadership parallels a coaching perspective where the relationship between continuous personal and professional development is intertwined and the cornerstone of professional practice (Bachkirova, 2016).

Whilst the numbers that chose to engage with the poetic writing task were limited, the numbers who embraced reflexivity and creative expression, were higher. Of this group, all participants indicated they had benefitted either emotionally or in terms of affording choice as to a different way of connecting with self and others. Lucas summed up the sentiments of many as "*I saw ... the possibility*". In coaching, whether self or clients, that is the start of opportunity ... to expand horizons, to consider alternatives, to explore possibilities (Cox *et al.*, 2014). My research interest inherently reflects a challenge to traditional coaching practice by proposing poetry as a medium with which to embrace reflexive practice (Cunliffe, 2002). Inviting consideration of an alternative, creative approach reflects a challenge to existing practice and opportunity to expand personal capability and practice (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Canhu *et al.*, 2015).

This integrated theme considers the possibility and potential for the coach to move beyond reflective engagement as an individual practice or during supervision and using poetry as a reflexive vehicle to support personal growth and professional coaching practice. The theme promotes self-leadership and self-coaching as a supportive enabler of ongoing professional practice and valuable supervision sessions. The data suggests that investment in self reflects commitment to and accountability for self-leadership, self-care and self-development. Investing in self-care to avoid self-deception and self-sabotage is in the interests of coach and coachee and supports the enhancement of personal and professional capacity development (Bachkirova, 2016; Sela-Smith, 2016).



Analysis of Integrated Themes and Emergent Findings

The final stage of my research attends to extrication of the vital messages for each theme and draws upon analysis of CR data and releases the core elements of each theme. Extrication is an extension of the HI process, drawing upon the HSSI methodology. The four lenses supporting deeper analysis were Self Deception (Bachkirova, 2015), Basic Emotions (Plutchik, 2001); Adult Development (Kegan, 2009) and Self Doubt (Hindmarch, 2008), which emerged from creative application of the principles of Sela-Smith's (2002) HSSI process when analysing my poetic data. These four lenses extricated additional insight with the validation of such insight, drawing upon the work of Cunliffe and Coupland (2012) and offering the opportunity to experience anew findings relating to my research study and myself (Sela-Smith, 2002). Embracing the same four lenses to analyse the integrated themes that have emerged from my CRs' data, was vital in support of rigour and integrity of process, potential insights and correlation of experience.

Additional consideration of 'The Coach as an Individual' revealed the underlying complexity of self-leadership for the coach who endeavours to move beyond aspiration to action, bridging the gap between intent and application with respect to personal development (Cunha *et al.*, 2015; Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009). Supervision is promulgated as the vital enabler of ethical competent coaching practice, but my data indicates that investment in supervision is variable in terms of time and focus (Hawkins & Smith, 2006). Opportunities emerge in the formal development of coaches and supervisors to potentially address the development of a reflexive mindset in support of self-leadership and a quest to minimise issues of self-deception and self-imposed (unconscious) limits to growth, to support self-care and ongoing self-management (Bachkirova, 2016; Cunha *et al.*, 2015; Senge, 1990).

Similarly, additional consideration of Reflexivity, Poetry & Growth suggests poetry offers a unique approach to embracing reflexivity, creating opportunity to enhance personal capability, insight, learning and practice (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Cunliffe, 2002). Such considerations appear vital for professional coaching practice where the ongoing challenge in an unregulated profession is for each coach to hold self to account for authenticity and congruity, alongside ethical practice and professional standards (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Cox *et al.*, 2014). As suggested by Haertl (2014), Baker and Mazza (2004) and Pennebaker (1997), in this research study those who engaged with the writing task appeared to benefit emotionally, cognitively and practically. Additionally, many of the coaches, including myself, benefitted from consideration of related issues of self-care, wellbeing and development (Wall *et al.*, 2017; Bachkirova, 2016). Kegan, in discussion with Bachkirova (2009, p.18) notes *'it turns out to be interviewed this way is intrinsically rewarding'* as people feel they are being listened to in a genuine and authentic manner and that in turn, *'they are being understood.'* These sentiments were endorsed by Faye as *"openness, allowing and at the same time holding and containing"* provided *"a level of security and understanding"* that speaks to feeling valued and accepted as an individual in support of expansion, congruity and learning (Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009). Such gifts of appreciation and acceptance may be catalysts for personal, transformative growth and a move beyond existing personal narrative to realise true potential. However, responsibility for such endeavour relies upon the personal motivation, and curiosity of the individual coach (Cox *et al.*, 2014; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

Exploring the integrated theme of self-coaching and self-leadership through the four lenses reveals the challenges of effective self-leadership, efficient self-management and the crafting of authentic being, identity and narrative appear to be ongoing and unrelenting



(Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). The craft of becoming mirrors such sentiments. The potential of poetry or creative expression acting as a reflexive vehicle for cathartic release, sensemaking and revelation plus the analysis or review of the poetry, emerge as examples of self-leadership for some CRs (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017; Cunha *et al.*, 2015). As a coach, the potential returns of focusing beyond the known and familiar to move into the unfamiliar and unknown appear to lie in the enhancement of capability and capacity, plus personal and professional fulfilment (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2014).

Conclusions

Identity

The research indicates that a clear appreciation of the distinctions between reflection and reflexivity may not be confidently assumed by the professional coaching associations, academics, supervisors, coach and supervisor training providers or coaches. This appears to have consequences for personal growth, professional practice and ethical standards and to potentially afford a broader and deeper appreciation of the complexity and challenge(s) of being a coach (Cox *et al.*, 2014). Facilitation of personal deliberation as to the what, how and why of self as a coach focuses upon proactive ownership of one's personal development agenda, with accountability for its application residing with the individual (Cunliffe, 2004). This apparently carries implications for identity and personal narrative as a reflexive coach practitioner.

The writing of poetry supports self-expression and the bringing forth of alternative perspectives, insight and choice as to who I am and how I wish to be. Such existential considerations support clarity of identity and way of being, personally and professionally, in a postmodernist world of ambiguity and change. As a coach, such considerations support differentiation, alongside a wider contribution to the development and enrichment of personal and professional coaching practice (Cox *et al.*, 2014).

Beyond Personal Narrative

As an ongoing process of discovery and growth, reflexivity draws upon personal experience and demonstrates a commitment to exploring and learning about self, personal influence and the influence of others upon self. Personal responsibility and accountability for such practice resides with the individual coach and carries implications for professional, ethical and competent practice (Bachkirova, 2016). The creation of poetry emerges as a creative practice which facilitates a smooth transition between reflecting upon an experience and reflexively engaging with an experience. Such an approach may support personal challenges of engaging with reflexivity whilst facilitating wider and deeper self-awareness, and bringing forth alternative perspectives, insight, choice and learning for the individual (Grisoni, 2017).

The 'creation of poetry' as an enabler of reflexive practice directs attention towards 'growth' or breadth and depth of the whole person, drawing upon personal experience and enabling a platform for discussion, debate, collaboration and fresh insight for all parties (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015). Such an approach is likely to be systemic, occasionally uncomfortable, focused upon improvement and growth, with ongoing questions regarding impact and influence. Without a clear appreciation of the concept of reflexivity, engagement with an innovative arts-based approach such as writing poetry to engage with reflexivity may be a step too far without direct support to bridge potential experience and relevance-gaps (Wall, 2017; Palmer & Iordanou, 2015).



The Craft of Becoming

The research suggests that self-management, with its emphasis upon competencies and professional standards, is important for survival; however, self-leadership is an ongoing quest for personal growth through capability enhancement, personal care, and expansion. Professional coaching practice reflects the alignment of professional conduct, standards and values, which are in turn congruous with identity and narrative. Such congruity is an outcome of disciplined, ongoing investment in self-leadership and self-coaching, implying an awareness and curiosity about self and others whilst embracing and engaging with the emotional highs and lows associated with growth (Bachkirova & Kegan, 2009). With an understanding that perfection is unachievable, the aspiration for personal and professional congruity, development and growth is demanding, unremitting and reflects the highest levels of intent. As a means of sense-making and revelation of self to self, poetry can support professional coach development through the interweaving of skills development (*techné*), episteme (*knowledge of the field*) and into a mature level of practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Poetry facilitates the navigation of the complexities of life by embracing the plurality of what it is to be human and a professional coach in the twenty first century.

With self-leadership encompassing self-nurturing and self-nourishment plus the aim of ongoing expansion and learning, it appears self-management may offer a short-term coping mechanism whilst self-leadership affords long-term growth and development, based upon self-understanding, recovery and investment in reflexive practice (Cunha *et al.*, 2015). Self-leadership, rooted in a quest for balance across apparently competing dimensions such as mind and body, self and others, work and play, the new and the familiar, reflects a commitment to learning and in coaching, congruity (Cunha *et al.*, 2015). It appears that at the core of self-leadership lies courage, curiosity and compassion for self.

My research confirms that poetry is a useful reflective enabler for sense making and learning and reveals that writing poetry offers support for reflexive engagement, facilitating sense making, access to the subconscious and learning as it can act as a useful receptacle for emotional release, objectification and perspective. The creative writing process offers space, time and perspective to facilitate deeper reflexive consideration of personal values and beliefs, the influence of self and others in real time and retrospectively, bringing forth choice and opportunity for proactive learning and growth.

From a research perspective, this study makes contributions to the use and application of Heuristic Inquiry by combining HI with HSSI and draws upon mind mapping and word cloud techniques as part of the data analysis process.

Drawing upon HI as a methodology to explore Poetry, Practice and Potential has revealed opportunities for further research in two key areas. Consideration of reflexivity as a triple loop learning process, may offer emergent insights benefitting the training and development of coaches and supervisors whilst contributing to the enrichment of coaching capability (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015). Furthermore, the relationship between learning styles and reflexivity may merit investigation in support of facilitating engagement, learning and improving professional coaching standards (Iordanou *et al.*, 2017).

References

- Bachkirova, T. (2016). The Self of the Coach: Conceptualization, Issues and Opportunities for Practitioner Development. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(2), 143-156
- Bachkirova, T. (2015). Self-deception in coaches: an issue in principle and a challenge for supervision. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 8(1), 4-19



- Bachkirova, T., Jackson, P., Gannon, J., Iordanou, I. and Myers, A. (2017) Reconceptualising coach education from the perspectives of pragmatism and constructivism, *Philosophy of Coaching: An International Journal*, 2(2), 29-50 Retrieved December 2017 from <https://philosophyofcoaching.org/>
- Bachkirova, T., & Kegan, R. (2009). Cognitive developmental approach to coaching: an interview with Robert Kegan. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 2(1),10-22
- Bachkirova, T., & Lawton Smith, C. (2015). From Competencies to capabilities in the assessment and accreditation of coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 13(2), 123-140
- Bachkirova, T., & Shannon, N. (2013). Self-Deception in Leadership from a Developmental Perspective. *Integral Leadership Review* June 2013, [online] Retrieved 31st May 2016 from: <http://www.integral-review.org>
- Bachkirova, T., Spence, G., & Drake, D. (2016). *The Sage Handbook of Coaching*. London: Sage
- Baker, K.C., & Mazza, N. (2004). The healing power of writing: Applying the expressive/creative component of poetry therapy. *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, 17,141-154
- Baikie, K., & Wilhelm, K. (2005). Emotional and Physical Benefits of Expressive Writing. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*,11, 338-346
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101
- Briggs, A. (2012). *Waiting to be Found*. London: Karnac Books
- Canham, H., & Satyamurthi, C. (2003 & 2006). *Acquainted with the Night: Psychoanalysis and the Poetic Imagination*. London: Karnac Books Ltd
- Cox, E., Bachkirova, T., & Clutterbuck, D. (2014). *The Complete Handbook of Coaching*. 2nd ed. London: Sage Publications Limited
- Cunha, M., Pacheco, M., Castanheira, F., & Rego, A. (2015). Reflexive work and the duality of self-leadership. *Leadership* 0(0), 1-24
- Cunliffe, A. (2016). 'Qualitative Research Methodology' Lecture: Hull University 2nd March 2016
- Cunliffe, A. (2004). On Becoming a Critically Reflexive Practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*, 28(4) 407 - 426
- Cunliffe, A. & Coupland, C. (2012). From Hero to Villain to Hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations*, 65, 63-88
- Davidson, A. & Schwarz, D. (2011). Creative approaches to continuous development in Passmore. *Excellence in Coaching* (pp.217-236). London: Kogan Page
- Grisoni, L. (2017). Visual imagination, reflexivity and the power of poetry: inquiring into work-life balance. *Journal of Social Work Practice (CJSW)*, 31(1), 137-152
- Grisoni, L., & Page, M. (2015). The Special Topic of Organisational Disruption: An Editorial. *Organizational Aesthetics*, 4(1), 108-111
- Haertl, K. (2014). Writing and the development of the self-heuristic inquiry: A unique way of exploring the power of the written word [online]. *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory and Education* [Accessed 1/3/2017]
- Hawkins, P. (2015). *Humanistic Psychology in the 21st Century; The Next Revolution We Need?* Marianne Fry lecture, 26th September 2015 UK: Bristol
- Hawkins, P. & Smith, N. (2006). *Coaching, Mentoring and Organizational Consultancy* Supervision and Development Reprint. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2010
- Hindmarch, L. (2008). An Exploration of the Experience of Self Doubt in the Coaching Context and the Strategies Adopted by Coaches to Overcome It. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring* Special Issue No. 2 Autumn [online]. Retrieved on 15th January 2016 from <http://www.obc.org.uk/2008/11>
- Iordanou, I., Hawley, R., & Iordanou, C. (2017). *Values and Ethics in Coaching*. London: Sage
- Kaplan, R., & Norton, D. (2001). *The Strategy Focused Organisation*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press
- Kegan, R. (2009) What "form" transforms? A constructive-developmental approach to transformative learning in Illeris, *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists in their own words*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Mazza, N. (2006). *Poetry Therapy: Theory & Practice*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge
- Mezirow, J. (2009) An overview on transformative learning in Illeris. *Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists in their own words*. Abingdon: Routledge
- Morgan, C. (2010). *What Poetry Brings to Business*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press



- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications Limited
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic Research: Design, Methodology & Applications*. London: Sage Publications Limited
- Ozertugrul, E. (2015). A Comparative Analysis: Heuristic Self Search Inquiry as Self Knowledge and Knowledge of Society. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1-15
- Palmer, G. & Iordanou, I. (2015). *Case Based Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century* Chapter 2: Exploring Cases Using Emotion, Open Space and Creativity. UK: Library
- Patton, M. Q. (2002 & 2014). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory & Practice*. 3rd & 4th ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Pennebaker, J.W. (1997). Writing about emotional experiences as a therapeutic process. *Psychological Science*, (8),162-165
- Plutchik, R. (2001). The Nature of Emotions. *American Scientist*, 89, 344 -350
- Polyani, M. (1964) The Duke Lectures [online] Retrieved 29th May 2015 from <http://www.polanyisociety.org/Duke-intro.htm>
- Sale, R., (2016) Research methodology for researching professionals *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring* Special Issue No. 10, 217-223
- Sela-Smith, S. (2002a). Heuristic research: A review and critique of Moustakas's method. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 42(3), 53-88
- Sela-Smith, S. (2013). [online] Retrieved on 29th January 2016 from <http://www.infiniteconnections.us/heuristic-self-search-inquiry-january-2003>
- Sela-Smith, S. Heuristic Self Search Inquiry 12/6/16 'pers.comm.'
- Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Doubleday
- Wall, T. (2017). *Becoming A Transpersonal Leader*, Chapter 23: Infusing Ethics into Leadership Learning & Development [online] Retrieved on 31st May 2017 from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315874924>
- Wall, T., Rossetti, L., Scott, C., & Bloomfield, B. (2017). Writing well or writing to get well? [online] *Writing In Education*, March 2017, 1-7 Retrieved on 31st May 2017 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232591493_The_Writing_Cure_How_Expressive_Writing_Provides_Health_and_Emotional_Well-Being
- Whyte, D. (1994). *The Heart Aroused*. New York: Doubleday

Author Information

Jacki McCartney is an Organisation Development practitioner with extensive experience in Change Management and Executive Coaching. A strategy specialist, Jacki has a successful record in improving the performance of organisations, teams and individuals by focusing on the enhancement of internal capability to meet external opportunity and achieve wider goals.

