

**Embodying Transitional Awareness: Sensing and Shifting Place and Space  
A Conversation between Penelope Best & Jim Force**

**Penelope Best, Sr. DMT**

Dance Psychotherapy Supervisor  
Milton Keynes, ENGLAND  
Email: pbestworks@aol.com

**Jim Force, Ph.D.**

Leadership Development Educator  
Victoria, British Columbia, CANADA  
Email: jforce@shaw.ca  
Website: www.jimforce.ca

**Introduction**

During the last AMO conference in Krakov, two of us from very different backgrounds, continents and professions met and felt that our experiences could enrich the work of the other. We did not yet know how this might develop and as stimulation we set ourselves the challenge of co-leading an experiential workshop at the next AMO conference. In preparation for this we engaged in extended iterative, reflective conversations, which we tracked over time. We discovered that, while based in two very different professional arenas, we share a common aim: to facilitate creatively the animation and embodiment of professional practices. For Jim (JF) this facilitation is grounded in work within leadership development, while for Penelope (PB) it is situated within the arts therapies, i.e. Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP). Professionally in different ways both of us feel responsible for assisting practitioners to reflect upon their practice, to locate themselves within their work contexts and to explore leadership possibilities creatively. We found through our discussions a shared reverence for the power of “place” and how “place” and, indeed space, can shape the facilitator, the participants and the learning opportunities. We agreed that the transitions between places and spaces are of paramount importance in facilitating awareness of location, be that of one’s body, one’s praxis, or one’s perspective.

We chose to use an initial focus from the arts therapies field, that of the physical body, to stimulate related issues for leadership development generally. We were intrigued by one model of reflection (Embodiment-Representation cycle) used by Penelope when working with therapists as this offers a way of thinking about shifts between being IN the practice and talking or showing ABOUT the practice. In turn when one represents something of one’s practice, by writing about it, or drawing a diagram, or creating a metaphoric poem, this new distance or perspective can help one go back INTO the practice. We used this model’s focus upon transitions to frame both our planned workshop and our reflective research conversations. For this paper we have synthesized wide-ranging ideas around the topic of place, space and leadership. We illustrate seminal aspects with sections of our reflective dialogue. We thought it important to share with readers some of our iterative dialogue across distant space as evidence of our own lived embodiment of reflection. Our aim in doing this is to highlight possible professional synergies that could enrich practices within leadership development.

**Locating Ourselves in Place and Space**

*“Place is palpable. We live in a specific context, feeling all that is around us. Perception interweaves past with present and with expectation about the future.” (Olsen, 2002, p. 202)*

In defining terms we came across differences, which then shaped our subsequent conversations. While both of us were aware of the sense of place as needing both a witness and sensory data, Penelope, being a dancer, connects to bodily kinesthetic and sensory details (sights, sounds, range of space) and Jim pays attention of the overall intuitive feel, “the state-of-being.” Locating, witnessing and sensing formed part of a more concrete definition of place, whereas space was felt to shift and change, to shape us as we worked. We wondered how “place,” i.e. the structures and openings that comprise location, influences the space we occupy, particularly in terms of people in their organizational lives. We thought it important to focus upon transitions between places, using space differently, to stimulate awareness of potential change for leaders.

### **Awareness of Transitions**

*“Our bodies are our vehicles of awareness.” (Halprin, 2003, p. 20)*

**PB:** Space has both environmental as well as internal elements. In other words both aspects speak about our experience of being in our bodies within relationship. Psychophysical theory supports the work of Dance Psychotherapists Loman and Foley (1996) indicating that environmental space, our relationship to shaping in space, has much to do developmentally with our experience of trust in relationship. The way we move, the qualities (fast or slow, tight or loose, heavy or light, etc.), is more to do with our inner drives and needs, while the way we shape our bodies in space (moulding, or pointing, or curving) has to do with adaptive experiences of being in relationship with the environment (other people and obstacles and space).

**JF:** This reminds me of an experience I had while teaching at Royal Roads University in Victoria, BC. After teaching a three-hour seminar in a windowless room filled with tables and chairs, I went for a walk through the campus’s old-growth forest. As I entered the forest I noticed myself expanding. I felt bigger, more open and expansive than I had in the classroom. This was true cognitively as well as physically. In the classroom I was much more focused on what I knew and how to impart it to my students. As such I was much more contained not just cognitively but physically and emotionally as well. I also knew my “place” in relationship to my students as their teacher. In the forest my mind filled with questions and speculations related more to what I didn’t know than what I did know. I felt more light-hearted, more at ease and definitely more reflective. In the forest my sense of relational place, as taking “my place in the world,” was much less clear to me. Yet, in terms of my “shaping” in these places, I certainly was more comfortable with and aware of my relationship to the openness of the forest than in my relationship to the confines of the classroom.

**PB:** Your description is fascinating because it appears to go against the psychophysical theory in which a sense of safety and comfort tends to widen the shape of the body, while danger or discomfort leads to narrowing or shrinking away, with whole or part of the body. In your case one would assume that the known space of the classroom would be a professionally “safe” space for you, therefore leading to a widening; however, the room itself had no sight of the sky, no expansion within it and some discomfort physically. This would be below a conscious level and it was only through noticing the shifts, the change of expanding, breathing in, widening and lengthening that you become cognitively aware of opening both your mind and your body.

**JF:** What struck me most about this experience of moving from classroom to forest was my awareness of the embodied transition I went through. I became aware of the impact the change of place had on my occupation of space. I tended to flow through the forest moving spontaneously, while in the classroom I was much more contained and controlled. In the classroom I am more conscious of what is expected of me as the teacher - what it means to me, and what I think it

means to others. What it means to be in the forest, particularly on my own, is much more open-ended. I really wasn't aware of the impact of "place" on me until I had spent some time in the forest. The shift was from unconscious to consciousness of my relationship to place and the space I occupied in it.

**PB:** The idea of expectation being linked to place is inextricable from expectation linked to role. Roles are very often located, embodied, and enacted in specific places. The body is often covered in role-related clothing or costume, which also signifies something of our role or status. Hence it can be disconcerting to undress in a library, but not on the beach. We expect certain behaviours in certain places. The role of teacher/supervisor/expert is often linked to teaching spaces; we get shaped by these spaces, often constrained by them. Restriction of movement or space may also restrict thinking and musing; motoric release can open cognitive pathways. Walking and thinking can bring about solutions, new ideas, whereas constantly pouring over the same problem at a desk may not. Freeing the flow, the muscular and respiratory flow, can free the imagination and certainly different perspectives.

**JF:** This notion of roles and expectations located, embodied and enacted in special places intrigue me. In many of today's organizations managers and leaders are asked to think outside-of-the box, to be creative, to manage change and transition effectively (Palus & Horth, 2002) without any consideration for how they and their behaviours are shaped by the space they occupy and the impact this may have on changing expectations. I doubt that many managers and leaders are aware of how their physical surroundings impact their functioning – they are much like the proverbial fish that discover water last.

**PB:** Being able to notice difference, to notice change from homeostasis is an area anthropologist Bateson (1979) addressed in his seminal work on the ecology of mind. Our muscles notice when something is different, out of the ordinary. The ordinary, the known, goes below our consciousness otherwise we would go mad quite quickly if we had to pay attention to every stimulus or neural message. Within my creative supervision work I find Bateson's notion of the "difference that makes a difference" really useful and accessible. As leaders (therapists, parents, partners, presidents, etc.) if we put in something, which is too different from the system, it often meets with resistance, ridicule, or shock. Too little difference is simply not noticed. But the right amount of difference helps awareness and invites the possibility of reflection.

**JF:** Which is exactly what happened for me. The difference between classroom and forest was just enough change to stimulate reflection and speculation about what was going on for me related to my teaching. I realize that the story I've made up about how a teacher is to behave really influences the space I take up in the classroom both quantitatively and qualitatively. I take up a considerable amount of space but it is a fairly scripted space based on my role and expectations as teacher. I find it very difficult and risky to step outside of that story and behave differently, to take up space in a different manner.

**PB:** In my work as a supervisor with therapists one of my central themes is paying close attention to transitions. These may be the body's moment of recovery from a previous action, or the felt-sense of what shifts when we move between trying out a client's movement and shifting back to our own movement or in your case from one location or place to another. What lies in between, what changes, e.g. what needs to be done to shift? What are we carrying in our body or mind from some prior event/place?

**JF:** For me to make the shift from doing to reflection, from knowing to curiosity, involved movement from the classroom to the forest. This shift wasn't immediate as it took five minutes of

walking through an open field before I arrived at the forest's edge. Yet, the shift really didn't manifest itself until I was fully immersed by the forest. Walking into the forest I was carrying the weight of what it means to be a university teacher. I was carrying the weight of my need to be competent. However, once well within the forest, I stopped, raised my arms to the sky and slowly turned around in a full circle. In doing so my whole body lightened up, I began smiling - the shift had occurred. It was then that I began reflecting on what had been going on in the classroom and what I had been teaching.

**PB:** It seems as if your body assisted you with your transition; your embodied transitional awareness. Your body wisdom knew you needed to stretch, open and quite literally turn around to be able to look from a different perspective. The breath is connected to our experience of space, across the three planes - widening and narrowing, lengthening and shrinking, bulging forward and hollowing back. It seems your breath had been held tighter than usual within the windowless room (and I don't know what topics the 3-hour seminar held), you felt "burdened," or shrinking down, from your professional role, and your body, given space, lengthened and widened into a smile. Your body, quite literally, given space, created more internal space to think, to be different with more options.

**JF:** While it may well have been that my body assisted me in my transition, I had no cognitive awareness of that. My shift in perspective was a spontaneous, unintentional occurrence. I have walked in that forest many times between classes and not made any kind of perceptual shift. Perhaps it is the practice, the discipline, of movement between spaces and places combined with the intention of reflection that opens up the possibility for shifts to occur.

**PB:** This insistence that there was no intentionality, no active cognition pulls me to remind you of the many ways of knowing, the primary being nonverbal, below cognitive awareness, and IN the practice, IN the doing, IN the body. Your example would make a useful case study for supervision, to check out at a bodily level and a metaphoric level what was happening this time, on this walk in the forest, which facilitated the transition for you. We could then find effective practices to repeat the sequence of opening awareness, which could be used within leadership training, to tap into and "read" other ways of knowing.

## Social Space

*"What goes on between individuals defines what an organization is and what it can become." (Short, 1998, p. 16)*

Another important dimension of space in shaping experience is that of shared space, social space. How we live in co-existence with each other is a question of leadership, be it in organizational, community or family contexts. Ron Short (1998) contends that leadership success is "about how to learn from others who have different perspectives" (p. 1). In the context of our discussion this means learning how to shape and be shaped within mutual space. In this regard, perhaps organizations, however defined, can be thought of as organized and shared space designed with some particular purpose in mind and "placed" in some location - real or virtual.

From an arts perspective the social nature of space might be guided by the necessity of audience, and where choreographers or artists might actively direct their gaze through stillness, or intensity, or staging. There are similar concerns for leaders, or anyone within an organization who is trying to influence others, and needs to pay attention to space choreographically in order to effectively convey an idea, make a proposal or move people to action. How do they "place" themselves in relation to others? How do they make use of space? How do they shape themselves? What can

leaders learn from artists about guiding the audience's gaze? And in what ways does the audience guide or mould the leader?

How we place ourselves in space becomes an important part of human interactions, often determining a sense of status between people as Johnstone (1981) argues, "every inflection and movement implies a status, and no action is due to chance" (p. 33). In shared space we act both "into" and "out of" situations constantly shaping one another through our roles, tasks, expectations, and perceptual positions (Pearce, 1994). While both Griffin (2002) and Shaw (2002) address these interactions in their discussions of complex responsive processes in relationship to leadership and organizations, this notion of "interactional shaping" (Best, 2003) has yet to be transferred in any meaningful manner into leadership development training. However, within arts therapy work reflection upon multiple positions, self and other is core.

### **Where to Locate the Body**

*"The body is the medium through which we experience ourselves and the environment. The ways we gather and interpret sensory information affect both how we monitor our internal workings and how we construct our views of the world."* (Olsen, 2002, p. xxi)

The interactive nature of relationship means that we all (whatever profession) bring our own embodied experiences and expectations to any dialogue, to any interactive space. Verbal and, often more importantly, non-verbal conversations are then created. From the DMP field we are reminded that our bodies can "tell" us a lot, if we listen, and they "speak" loudly to others, often without our awareness. However, within the leadership development programmes it appears that bodily engagement is largely absent with the exception of outdoor team-based challenges designed to animate team and problem-solving concepts. While these physical activities might generate elements of personal awareness, there is little discussion or reflection as to how these experiences relate directly to their bodily responses in relation to the space taken up and what can be learnt from such reflection. Potential transferable learning about the information their bodily responses play within the space leaders occupy in the interactive relationships they have with others may be lost.

Bodily responses hold important clues and remind us of the role of our senses in practice-based learning. Interrogating our own actions can be an effective way of better understanding our learning and leadership practices. At present in leadership development the emphasis of practice-based learning is on the application of content material rather than on understanding of our bodily responses, whereas in DMP application, practice and bodily responses are located in the same place. To assist practitioners within DMP to understand their own and other's experience in relationship building we emphasise the necessity of actively and creatively shifting positions (i.e. perceptual, physical, theoretical). However, within leadership development while there is appreciation that there are different perspectives for any given topic or situation, many leaders have difficulty in shifting perspectives in real-life situations and most development programs spend little time or provide little opportunity for participants to actually experience these shifts in a bodily sense.

Within this paper our rationale for locating the body at the center of leadership development (within both fields) is to stimulate reflection upon what we bring to each encounter that might be shaping possibilities for ourselves and others. Using projective arts-based methods we can facilitate shifts from participation, to representation, to reflection and application all of which influences the space we take up in the places where we are located.

## Creative Space

*“Reflection needs to be given space to breathe and emerge  
and for that needs space for silence, and space  
and media for representation.” (Alerby, 2003, p. 45)*

Winnicott (1971) views the creative space as potentially risky; the transitional space between fantasy and reality, between objects, experienced as the play space between people. This is a space where we are allowed enough *risk* to learn, develop and create, a space where the natural anxiety provoked by change is contained. It is a space in between inner and outer world, where inter-relationships, inter-subjectivity and creativity occur. The transitional space in Winnicott’s work refers to the “me/not me” threshold. How we get to know what is ourself and what is not ourself, a potent idea for organizations when coupled with play.

While terms such as “serious play” and notions such as spontaneity and curiosity (Palus & Horth, 2002) are becoming more common in the leadership development literature, in the lived experience of organizations the “play space between people” may still be very scripted through well-defined responsibilities, roles and hierarchies. Structures and policies tell employees who they can and can’t talk to as well as what they can and can’t say. Hence, the play space has often become highly constrained. In addition people enter the play space with a story they’ve made up in their heads (fantasy) as to who the other is and what will and won’t be said or done in the encounter. But the actual encounter (reality) is seldom the same as their fantasy (Short, 1998). Perhaps then the transitional space is that space (in time and location) when people let go of their fantasy expectations and open themselves to possibilities. As such they enter the creative space, the space of improv (Madsen, 2005).

From an arts therapies perspective playful engagement, improvising and reframing lead to opening possibilities, befriending ourselves, and our “selves.” Moving between different modes of representation allows different ways of looking at where we have been, gaining different distances from experience, from the felt-sense. These active ways assist us in becoming as curious about our own creative vocabularies, our aesthetic sensibilities and prejudices as those of other people and of systems/organizations.

In describing creative places, Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests that certain environments have a greater density of interaction and provide more excitement and a greater effervescence of ideas; therefore, they prompt the person who is already inclined to break away from conventions to experiment with novelty more readily than if he or she had stayed in a more conservative, more repressive setting. (p. 129)

Given this perspective, creative places (The Banff Centre being one such place) are where we can let our ideas flow and take risks and experiment with new ways of being and of doing things. They are settings that stimulate reflection upon personal inner and outer landscapes and allow for the creation of “sensory maps” of personal experience in relationship with organizational landscapes. Creative spaces provide us with the opportunity to begin the process of adaptation to change, those difficult shifts in personal identity connected with changes in role, job, security, responsibility and location, changes that involve the crossing of new thresholds, the liminal space in between. Through becoming aware of how we feel in our bodies, and the stories we tell about our lived-experience, what filters we look through and our capacity to make and notice transitions we can better understand and more creatively lead the organizations within which we operate.

## **Embodiment – Representation Cycle**

**PB:** My experience within arts therapies supervision of the constant transitions between impression and expression, between embodying learning and representing learning became conceptualized as the Embodiment-Representation cycle. Intuitively I incorporated more and different expressive means to support the non-verbal experience of both clients and supervisees. Bodily experience would make an impression on the mover (and observer), who then represented the experience through drawing, talking, sculpting objects, poetry etc which in turn made an impression on the participant. This is a similar process to that in art of the relationship between the creator, the art and the viewer. In switching back and forth between modes I was supported by the considerable evidence of cross modal fluency now within neuroscience (see Corrigan and Wilkinson, 2003) which indicates that emotions, actions, and cognition are connected and expression in one form “speaks” to experiences in another.

**JF:** All of this of course is within the context of the place and space we inhabit in the moment. The bodily experience occurs in a location and as we give meaning to the experience through representation, the location gains significance. My example of transitioning between the classroom and the forest illustrates this point. Now after having talked and written about the experience not only do I have a new understanding of the experience, but I also have a new connection with the forest. When I return to it, I do so with the possibility of transition.

**PB:** I love the quote from W. Barnet Pearce (1994, p. xvii) who has dealt with conflict resolutions within communities for decades when he speaks of finding our identity as “a fluid contingent, unfinished process in which we participate from a perspective more like that of a paddler of a canoe on a whitewater river, than a cartographer mapping the river’s course.” Once again I come up against a questioning of the Embodiment and Representation cycle. This quote seems to separate the unfolding action (embodiment?) from a static map (representation?). I don’t see representation within my model as static because I am emphasizing the continual shifting between expression and impression, that the representation itself makes an impression. How does this fit with the map? How does this fit with the many, many models and formulae within organizational theory?

**JF:** I, too, see the action and the map as inseparable. I have written elsewhere, “as I come to know myself, I come to know the world; as I come to know the world, I will come to know myself” (Force, 2000, p. 7). I take this to mean a continuous, dynamic flow between embodiment and representation, between mapmaker and map. Or as Ken Wilber (1996) explains, “It’s not that there is a map on the one hand and the territory on the other . . . but rather that the map is itself a performance of the territory it is trying to map” (p. 65).

**PB:** Somehow they get separated too far from the experience and in this they lose their power to effect, their power to make an impression upon the actors, the players in the situation. I am referring to proximity of experience and representation of that experience, of what I call our “personal epistemology born out of touching the world” (Best, 2005). There is a need to keep alive the models within workplaces, for them to be owned and lived by those involved. Dare I say, “embodied”? Kinesthetic descriptions may help re- engagement. In this I feel that arts modalities as a means of personal expression, can facilitate ownership and quite literally a sense of place within the work . . . place!

**JF:** Your notion of “embodied” is quite similar to the notion of “animation” used in The Banff Centre leadership development programs. In these programs we try to give life to, animate, the theories and models we teach through aesthetic-based learning processes. These include both

nature-based activities as well as arts-based activities. We have come to the realization that much of organizational theory has, as you say, become so far removed from peoples lived experience that they can't make sense of it; they can't bring the two together.

**PB:** It may be that in order to bring them together we have to enter that risky creative space we spoke about earlier. In my arts therapies world we are quite comfortable in a landscape of creative processes populated by ambiguity, chaos, uncertainty, risk, play, not- knowing while still continuing the relational dance.

**JF:** While there is an ever-growing body of organizational literature related to the need for leaders to deal with ambiguity, chaos, uncertainty, risk and creativity, it is not something most participants in the leadership development programs I'm familiar with find comfortable. Thus, we need to be able to create learning processes that facilitate the development of people's comfort with these various aspects of unpredictability.

**PB:** While a tutor on an MBA creativity module, I was confronted by the strong need for structure, for measurable outcomes and a definite pull away from the slippery, fluid aspects of creativity. However, as I strongly believe there can be no change without play (i.e. playing with ideas is akin to playing with objects, playing in relationship), we managed to utilize metaphors formed through multiple media e.g. movement, sound, text, objects, shapes. These can be imagistic, as well as linguistic, acting as bridge builders between unique and shared descriptions of experience, thereby facilitating externalization of internal processes.

**JF:** This is what is typically missing in leadership development programs. Traditionally, such programs have relied mostly on direct teaching, case studies, and small group discussions all of which focus only on verbal expression. While this is starting to change, the use of other modalities is typically quite limited.

**PB:** In my field experiential learning through practice-based activities, rather than didactic methods, are the prime means of developing leadership qualities. As the Arts psychotherapies value alternative forms of expression about human experience (symbolic, narrative, metaphoric, imagistic, aural, and the embodied), there are opportunities to use these aesthetic languages in practice. The role of the leader requires a critical evaluation of his or her own experience and by shifting aesthetic languages more can be expressed.

### **Paradox : Distance and Belonging**

*“Place is security, space is freedom; we are attached to the one and long for the other. . . . What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.”*  
(Yi-Fu Tuan as cited in Olsen, 2002, p. 31)

**PB:** Is it a paradox that distance can bring us closer? Closer to an understanding, a core issue, or an essence or a pattern, just as one can't see the wood for the trees? Probably what Dramatherapist Jones (2005, p. 149) refers to as “aesthetic distance,” which when combined with close encounter, provides “*playful space*.”

**JF:** The distance in time and through the reflective writing I've done in our conversations has most definitely helped me understand the transition I went through in my experience of moving from the classroom to the forest. The representation of the experience has been the “playful space” for learning.

**PB:** And you actively moved between places; as you described the outside quite literally pulled you to engage and stretch upwards, outwards.

**JF:** “Places” have a magnetic draw to them for a variety of reasons - I would suggest all reasons are first and foremost based on the stories we as humans tell about them. Having said that, I am sure that there is something intrinsically real about the places we make up stories about that have generated the stories in the first place. I think these stories are what you would refer to as the “representation” aspect of your embodiment-representation cycle.

**PB:** Yes, initially an expression of a bodily experience. Hence a story about a place, a painting of a place, says something about our experience. However, as soon as the expression is out, it has the potential to make an impression, to affect us and others, and the cycle starts again: impression-expression-impression. This is the magnetic quality about which you speak.

**JF:** When drawn to mountains we have an embodied experience that is different from being in the city or by the sea or in the desert. Each landscape has its own atmosphere that we respond to through our bodies. But we aren’t drawn to all mountains, cities, seas or deserts equally. Rather there are some that have more “appeal,” i.e. ones that have a stronger draw, a more powerful story in that they elicit a more powerful embodied experience than other mountains, cities, seas or deserts. For example a particular mountain may have a more breath-taking view, a special feature such as a hot springs or fossil beds, or be inhabited by particular plants or animals that aren’t found elsewhere. Or it may be the highest or most difficult place to reach. Or there may have been some important human event that occurred there - a vision, a battle, a ritual, a birth or some such thing. In any event, we have made up a story as to why this place is important and thus travel there so that we too can experience what others have experienced, thus the basis of pilgrimages (Force, 2000). We travel there for the embodied experience of it whether we know it or not.

**PB:** I can’t help but notice the significance of your language embedded within experience and in this I am supported by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). You speak of places with a “breath-taking view” or one, which is “most difficult to reach.” These are based within bodily experience and bodily memory, an intake of breath, or a physical challenge and struggle remembered in the muscles and bones. These become markers of place or provide sufficient difference in bodily experience to provide significance, hence memory.

**JF:** Yes, that is exactly what it is. The places that hold the most power for me are ones in which I have been most physical including the emotional. This takes me off on a bit of a tangent, but I’m curious as to how much resistance to change, change of place and space, has to do with the physical connection we have with them.

**PB:** Interestingly within my world the concept of “against,” of resistance can be a positive aspect, one which helps to build a sense of self. We get a sense of who we are by bumping up against the surfaces of the world (our mothers’ bodies, then other surfaces and other people). I often take issue with therapists who talk about clients “resisting” an intervention or being resistant to change, as if that opposition is the problem. Perhaps the opposition provides the essential question, provides the tension, the lively pull between places as well as vital information about the importance of the resisted change between places.

**JF:** Hence, if I am physically connected to a “place” and have created an identity around it, then perhaps it is my connection to place that “holds me in place” rather than moving me to a new

place. Thus, there needs to be a pull, as you are suggesting, or a connection with the new place that is physically based.

**PB:** For me the sea has such a pull, such a volume of immediacy and continual change which draws me near. The mountains for me feel definite, immovable (which I know now is not strictly true in the longer timescale and shift of tectonic plates), holding structures into which I can lean. I have a favorite view in Scotland of a mountain landscape, which I carry with me everywhere I go in the world. This landscape is deeply engrained from my childhood, imbued with memories of climbing, walking, searching and simply leaning on a gate and drinking it in. The sense of place connected to this view conjures up generations of family history and belonging. Yes, belonging is a very important theme for me concerning sense of place.

**JF:** Belonging is important for me as well. I have to establish a sense of belonging in order to feel connected to the place and before I can take up space within the place. I tend to establish a sense of space by exploring the human and natural elements of the place. At The Banff Centre I have wandered through most of the galleries, theatres, studios and the surrounding natural environment. At Royal Roads I've explored many of the trails that wind through the old-growth forest and spent hours in the numerous gardens, as well as having wandered through the various buildings. Doing so grounds me. It enhances my ability to take up space, to create my own space within the place.

**PB:** Within DMP literature you know who you are developmentally through verticality, via a sense of gravity and mastering of gravity. It should not go unnoticed that you state that taking time to move through spaces, places of potential belonging, "ground" you. We can lose a sense of self, of ownership and belonging within settings which have no character, no definition, quite literally nothing to grab hold of. It feels really important to bring the outside in, to bring qualities of nature and of place inside institutions, inside organizations.

**JF:** Or take the inside out. As Bob Sandford (2002) says,  
When the great cultural engine we carry around inside us runs out of gas, there is a profound moment when we can be overwhelmed by light and wind and sun. Suddenly we see nature, not as something alien but as a unified whole out of which we have emerged. (p. 22)

**PB:** I get this sense in meditation, when I quiet myself and connect with gravity, with the pulls between ground and sky. Here, outside place becomes less important; I can meditate anywhere, and place shifts to internal space and only from that to connections with externality. I get a sense of being part of a larger space, of shared time for both humans and other life. I belong to life, to the places of living.

**JF:** One of the first things I did when I started teaching at Royal Roads University was to purchase a fleece vest with the RRU logo on it. I did the same at The Banff Centre. These articles of clothing serve as a symbol acknowledging that I am a part of the place. Seldom do I arrive on either campus without wearing an article of clothing that advertises the institution. Psychologically this gives me permission to start establishing a space within the institution. Making space "mine" is also an important aspect of the power of place. The more I have made the space mine, filling it with things near and dear to me, the stronger my attachment to it. This growing attachment then provides the base from which I can be fully present and extend myself out to the world.

## Knowing Your Place

*“You can’t know who you are, unless you know where you are”*  
(Wendell Berry as cited in Sandford, 2002, p. 21)

**JF:** I can’t truly have a sense of place unless I’ve been there. By being there, not only do I have a sense of the place, but I also have a better sense of myself in relation to it. This ties into Sandford’s (2002) notion of “sense of place” in which he argues place has to capture you, leave you with an appreciation of the experience of it.

**PB:** Now this brings up for me quite a different sense regarding exploration of self and place. I love the words of dancer Nancy Stark Smith:

Where you are when you don’t know where you are is one of the most precious spots offered by improvisation. It’s a place from which more directions are possible than anywhere else. I call this the Gap . . . the momentary suspension of reference point. (1987, p. 3)

**JF:** I find Smith’s quote quite provocative in that it is the opposite of what is typically stated in the world of leadership development. Traditionally leaders have been told that they need to know where they are at and where they are going if they are to be successful. What has been missing in the past is the “exploration” of self, of possibilities. Smiths’ Gap not only make it okay not to know where you are at, but reframes it into being an important place to be in order to enact possibilities.

**PB:** Yes, taking that risk to not have all the answers, and really engage with chance while allowing the internal to be made more explicit. I find that the differing modalities within arts therapy help to make visible that which is less visible, or even invisible.

**JF:** Wheatley (1994) applies physics field theory, the “invisible, non-material structures” (p. 48), that fill space (e.g. gravitational forces) to organizational space, “a quality of organizational life that we can observe in our experience, yet find elusive to pin down in specifics” (p. 52); e.g. culture, values, vision and ethics. In her field view of organizations Wheatley discusses how values, vision and other intangibles permeate organizational space and influence those who engage in organizational activities. As such she sees field creation as an essential part of developing and maintaining coherent organizational behavior.

**PB:** Applying physics field theory to organizational space to open up new perceptual views reminds me of the extensive use of metaphoric themes used within arts and narrative therapies. Facilitators of learning and professional and personal research use metaphors to “act as bridges between sensory processes, cognition and feelings, thus connecting us with ourselves (and others) on many levels” (Etherington, 2004, p. 135).

## Conclusion

*“We know we can potentially make a difference but we cannot know in advance of our acting how the emerging meaning of that difference will continue to develop.”* (Shaw, 2002, p. 95)

We ventured into writing this paper from two different perspectives with the common interest of enhancing our understanding and meaning of the implication of place on each of our leadership practices. When we started we knew not where it would take us. As with all self-organizing conversation we wandered here and there, diverging and converging, sometimes faltering,

sometimes progressing, but always trusting that as a “loose project of inquiry” (Shaw, 2002, p. 39), we would learn from each other as our conversation evolved and that meaning and understanding would emerge. By staying present to the possibilities of our improvisational conversation, we played with ideas about place, viewing it in terms of geographical location, sensory events, memory and history, sense of belonging, status, social space and transitions. Each of these brings forth different stories both lived and told, stories that give meaning to facts, bring order to chaos and provide us with a sense of reality (Loehr, 2007).

For leaders this sense of reality is often an enforced one involving the necessity of knowing where they are and where they are going. Through our iterative conversations weaving between two differing fields it became clear that there are times when it is helpful for leaders to fully experience and master the gap between known and unknown. This critical transitional “place” holds for leaders vital information, which can inform closer observation of what may be ‘inside the box’ and how the “outside” might be reached or breached. A focus upon transitions and varied aesthetic languages can be effective for accessing information about our location and shaping within organizational systems.

Arts-based investigations, while interrogating our own actions and transitions as leaders, can lead to an enhanced sense of ownership and belonging to a sense of “place.” The importance of the space between people as a potential creative space in itself could be an important focus for leadership development. What is evident from these iterative, evaluative conversations is that through our bodily experience we are in relationship with the environments we inhabit both physical and social. It is also evident that these relationships are fueled by an ongoing, dynamic and reiterative process of impression and representation, a process of transition that keeps theory alive in practice.

*We speak of genius when we speak of leadership, hoping for some of that elusive genius in ourselves, but the word genius in its Latin originality means simply, the spirit of a place. The genius of Galapagos lies in its being unutterably itself; the genius of an individual lies in the inhabitation of their peculiar and particular spirit in conversation with the world.*

(Whyte, 2001, p. 61)

## References

- Alerby, E. & Elidottir, J. (2003). The sounds of silence: some remarks on the value of silence in the process of reflection in relation to teaching and learning. In *Reflective Practice*, 4(1), 41-51.
- Bateson, G. (1979). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- Best, P. (2003). Interactional shaping within therapeutic encounters: Three dimensional dialogues. *The USA Body Psychotherapy Journal*, 2(1), 26-44.
- Best, P. (2005). Embodied choices and voices. In *Reinventing Education*. London: Synectics.
- Corrigall, J. & Wilkinson, H. (2003). *Revolutionary connections: Psychotherapy and neuroscience*. London: Karnac.

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Etherington, K. (2004). *Becoming a reflexive researcher: Using ourselves in research*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Force, J. (2000). *A case study in sensemaking: An ethnographic inquiry into a pre-conference geological field trip as an instance of sensemaking and as an instance of pilgrimage*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary. Retrieved on 28 June 2008 from <<http://www.jimforce.ca/library.html#dissertation>>.
- Griffin, D. (2002). *The emergence of leadership: Linking self-organization and ethics*. London: Routledge.
- Halprin, D. & Waller, J. S. (2003). *The expressive body in life, art and therapy: Working with movement, metaphor and meaning*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Johnstone, K. (1981). *Impro: Improvisation and the theatre*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, P. (2005). *The arts therapies: A revolution in healthcare*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- Loehr, J. (2007). *The power of story: Rewrite your destiny in business and in life*. New York: Free Press.
- Loman, S. & Foley, L. (1996). Models for understanding the nonverbal process in relationships. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 23(4), 341-350.
- Madsen, P. (2005). *Improv wisdom: Don't prepare, just show up*. New York: Bell Tower.
- Olsen, A. (2002). *Body and earth: An experiential guide*. New England: Middlebury College Press.
- Palus, C. & Horth, D. (2002). *The leader's edge: Six creative competencies for navigating complex challenges*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pearce, W. B. (1994). *Interpersonal communication: Making social worlds*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.
- Sandford, R. (2002). *Seeing and believing: Ecology and wonder in Canada's mountains*. Canada.
- Shaw, P. (2002). *Changing conversations in organizations: A complexity approach to change*. London: Routledge.
- Short, R. (1998). *Learning in relationship: Foundations for personal and professional success*. Seattle: Learning in Action Technologies.
- Smith, N. A. (1987). Taking no for an answer. *Contact Quarterly*, XII(2), 3-6.

Wheatley, M. (1994). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organizations from an orderly universe*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Whyte, D. (2001). *Crossing the unknown sea: Work as a pilgrimage of identity*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Wilber, K. (1996). *A brief history of everything*. Boston: Shambhala.

Winnicott, D.W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. London: Tavistock Books.