

The background is a watercolor illustration. The top half features a vibrant, multi-colored wash of yellow, red, pink, blue, and green, resembling a sky or a colorful nebula. The bottom half is a brown, textured area representing a cliff face, with a black line drawing of a jagged cliff edge separating the two sections.

NAVIGATING THE EDGES:

*Between
Emotional Safety
& Personal Growth*

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Abstract

This research explores the role that a process of creating emotional safety plays in supporting ones personal growth and development. Undertaken in the context of professional arts practice, this inquiry is autoethnographic, influenced by heuristic inquiry and assumes the arts as a way of knowing. It holds the values of safety, emergence, curiosity, and companioning and uses the MIECAT procedures to provide structure, safety and flexibility. The evidence of knowing is shown through the transparency by which I reflexively demonstrate my emergent process, multi-modally representing my experiencing as it unfolds. The inquiry begins through exploring a significant moment in my professional practice. While facilitating a leadership workshop for young people, I considered the ways I create safety for them to explore their edges. Throughout the inquiry, consecutive stages of navigating the edges were identified: *Invitation > Relational safety > Edge > Taking the Leap > Trust/Release > Meaning*. I found that safety is cultivated in relationship to others, through familiarity

and comfort. These personal findings can be applied to a wider professional context, particularly when facilitating individuals or groups. Providing emotional safety when facilitating spaces for growth is essential to ethical practice. When one can provide a safe space, participants have the opportunity to make empowered choices and develop the essential skills of reflexivity and emotional regulation.

Declaration

I certify that this research project is comprised of my original work except where indicated. Due acknowledgment has been made in the text and all materials provided.

Name: Amanda Scott

Signature: 

Date: 8 December 2016

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Introduction

*"Life is a traveling to the edge of knowledge,
then a leap is taken"*

(Lawrence, 1988, p. 262).

In my art therapy practice, I facilitate groups that generate spaces for exploration and mutual growth. I invite participants into a safely held space so that they may choose steps that may take them into the unknown or lesser-known places within.

This research is a self-inquiry, working with my own experiences, as well as an inquiry with three classmates. Together we inquire into the experience of being at the edge: the edge of what feels safe and comfortable, the edge of what is known.

A 'boundary' and an 'edge' as referred to in this research have slightly different meanings, yet they are similar. For me a boundary can create safety, through identifying what is okay and what is not okay relationally. A boundary can also indicate you are approaching your edge, and invite an

inquiry into whether to proceed.

The edge is individual, contextual and constantly changing. What is an edge for one person may not be for another. What was an edge for someone yesterday, may not be today. The edge in my view, is a space of alertness, risk and hyper-awareness, the edge of growth. When navigating the edge, how does one attend to both safety and growth?

Like my workshop participants, reading this research is an invitation. I have considered how I may offer a safe and held space for you as the reader, to explore the edges with me. We will follow the arts-based unfolding of creating safety, inquiring into embodied experiences at the edge and I will describe how to navigate the edge and safely reach the other side.

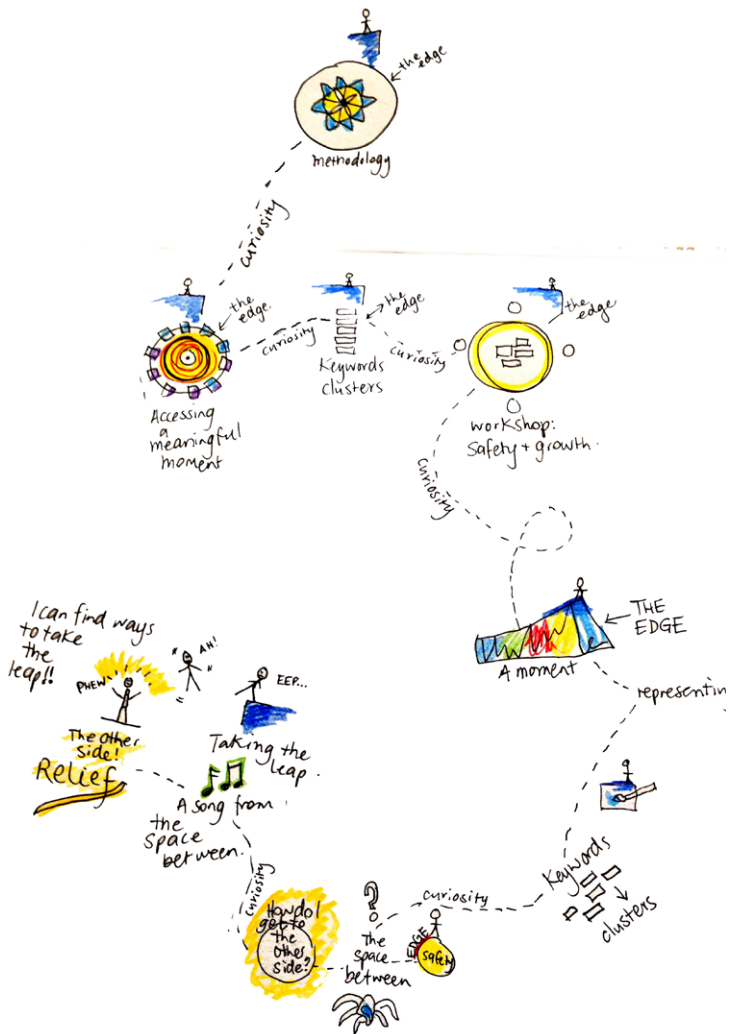


Figure 1: Map to the Edge & Beyond

Methodology

Mandala as a holding space

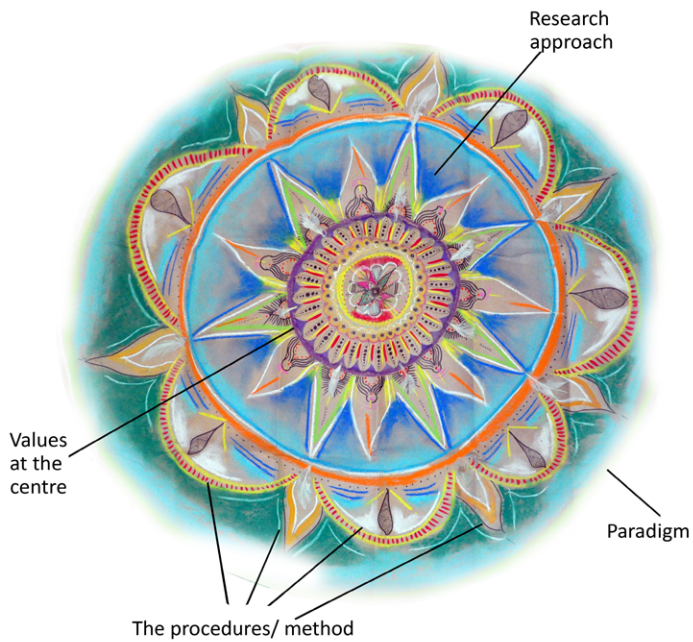


Figure 2: Mandala

I have selected the metaphor of a mandala to describe my research (Figure 2). A mandala is a form held within a circle, used by many cultures throughout history and explored in depth by Jung (1973). The structure of the circle, I believe, creates a sense of a safe place, with a sense of order, coherence and wholeness. (Jung, 1973, p. 20). The circle creates a boundary. In its centre, its core, this mandala holds my values of 'creating safety', 'emergence', 'curiosity' and 'companioning' (Figure 3).

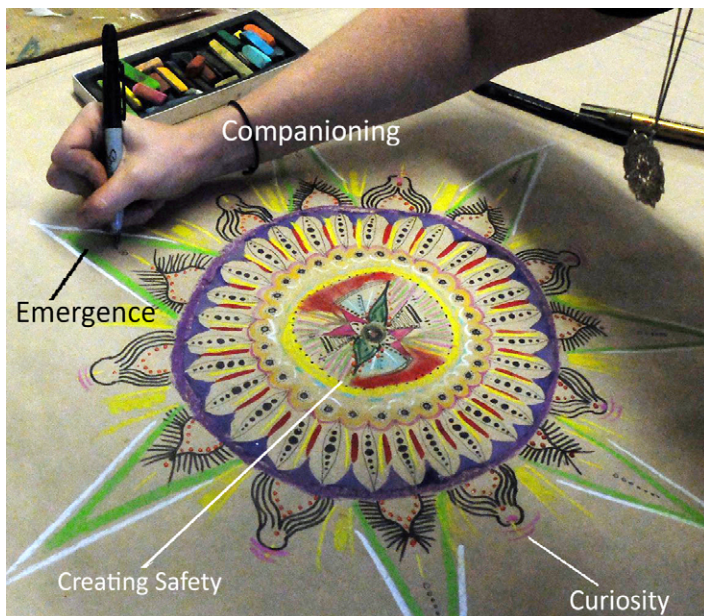


Figure 3: Values at the Centre

Moving outwards I represent the methodology that has guided my approach, the methods with which I have investigated and the paradigms my research is situated within. The layers are interlaced and intimately connected to create a safe space for growth.

Values

Safety

I value creating safe “containers” for people to explore within. Without safety, diving into the unknown can be uncomfortable and overwhelming. When exploring the unknown it can be helpful to begin with a known context. Structure and transparency in the steps of the process help to create safety. This is demonstrated as I consider the set-up and structure of the workshop I facilitate for my participants in this research. Using the arts to explore the unknown allows for space and distance from topics that feel emotionally charged and thus provides an invitation to ‘stay with’ discomfort in a safe way. The format and structure of this research also aims to provide safety to you, the reader. I aim to provide a safe space similar to that of the groups I facilitate. Clear steps, transparency and boundaries gently encourage you to come to the edge and engage with the unknown while being held safely.

Emergence

The inquiry process is cyclical, non-linear and in a constant state of becoming. Lett (2011) describes emergence as “an integrated combination of felt sensing, an informed intuition and a choice, moving into consciousness” (p. 274). In my research I have cycled into deeper levels of knowing, coming back to the same places with a different perspective. Emergence is facilitated by multi-modal expressions: visual, movement, word, or sound, all of which support the forming of embodied, pre-reflective knowing. Being present to the unknown requires me to suspend preconceived ideas in favor of possibility (Seeley & Reason, 2008, pp. 35-36). ‘Staying with’ present experiencing, calls for trust. As things are constantly in motion, there is an impermanence in each approximation of knowing. I value the emergent and ever-changing nature of this research as it helps me to access meaning, beauty and flow.

Curiosity

I am driven by curiosity and a desire to grow, transform and understand myself and others. Curiosity also forms a part of allowing for emergence.

In this research I hold gentle curiosity, bracketing out what I think I know to make space for something else. Curiosity is my driving force and calls me into adventure and into what Campbell (2008) refers to as a 'Hero's journey'. A simplified representation of the 'Hero's Journey' is shown in Figure 4. Curiosity encourages me to take a risk and step out of the comfort and safety of that which is known.



Figure 4: *The Hero's Journey*

Companioning

The research takes place multi-modally and through interactions with others. Companioning is an experience

of the values of safety, emergence, and curiosity, enacted with another. It is through being accompanied by another person, a companion, in my inquiry that I feel safe and supported to stay with the emergence of what may come. A companion is present alongside the inquirer and is in service of the inquiry. "The participant is an expert in their own knowing and a companion does not interpret but seeks to understand" (Lett, 2011, p. 269). Being supported with a compassionate presence when facing confusion, stuckness and frustration supports my need for safety.

Companioning offers me an ability to access acceptance, acknowledgment of where I am and the ability to hold seemingly opposite realities concurrently. The intersubjectivity present between the inquirer and companion offers valuable insights into the process. I was companioned by others, this modeled ways I could also be companioned by my art making and companioned by myself, with compassion and empathy. Even as I write this, I sit silently with a fellow student, writing side by side.

Research Approach

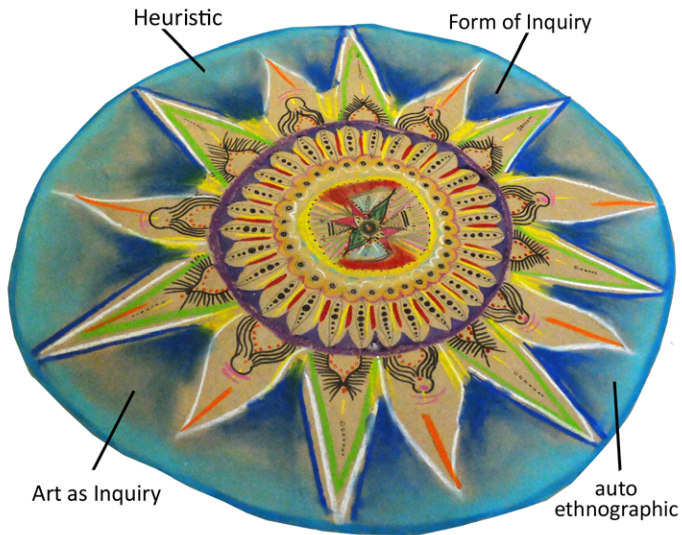


Figure 5: Research Approach

The 'Form of Inquiry'

The MIECAT form of inquiry is an exploration. It is a tool kit of procedures that assist with coming to meaning and making sense of something of value or significance (Lett, 2011, p. 152). The form of inquiry is arts-based, valuing multi-modal paths to knowing.

Arts as Inquiry

I value 'arts based inquiry' as a method of exploring something I am curious about. It gives life and movement to that which makes me feel stuck or confused. The arts open up another way of viewing something that may support the discovery of a preferred way of being (Allen, 1995, p. 17).

Using the arts to explore brings me lightness, space, safety, freedom, compassion and play. These modalities allow me to tune into a deeper, pre-verbal, 'felt-sense' knowing that may hold a resolution or personal resources within it, that I cannot access through my thinking mind. Through creative expression, I can access places within myself that were previously disconnected, restricted to openness or possibility. Art moves me away from 'right/wrong' and into openness.

There is a vulnerability in my research. As I followed the unfolding, I found many points of stuckness and I experienced feelings of being overwhelmed. Art provides safety for feelings to arise and speak through a language beyond words. McNiff (2004) tells me of the power of

“images as other” that can speak and support me in my inquiry (pp. 85-86). Visual art gives me an ability to tell my story through images and metaphor and helps me to hold a safe boundary around the way in which and how much I make explicit. My hope is for you, the reader, to connect with your stories as you travel with me.

Autoethnographic

This is an autoethnographic inquiry that uses the researchers’ personal experience as a reflexive process to uncover social and cultural experiences (Ellis, 2011, p. 1). Heron & Reason (1997) describe ‘experiential knowing’ as an imperative step to understanding ways of being (p. 280).

Heuristic Attitude

This inquiry has been undertaken with an heuristic attitude, of seeking to discover or find. Moustakas (1990) describes the phases of heuristic research as 'Initial engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication and Creative Synthesis' (p. 27). Although this inquiry does not strictly follow these stages, it holds this attitude by inviting an immersion into the unknown before reaching a creative synthesis, the final stage in this research process, that aims to achieve intuitive integration.

Methods



Figure 6: Methods

The MIECAT form of inquiry offers a selection of procedures to provide structure, safety and flexibility while assisting us to come to knowing. The procedures help us to make sense of our experience and make choices for ways of being that support our flourishing. They provide ways to companion and can be used in any order, with flexibility, as a response to what is present; often an “intuitive, embodied resonance” (Lett, 2011, p. 152). I find the structure of the procedures an essential component

to providing safety in this inquiry and they are tools for bringing presence and the awareness of iterative reflexivity.

The MIECAT Procedures

<i>Description</i>	The telling of what is seen or heard, without interpretation or opinion.
<i>Keywords/ key elements</i>	Chosen aspects that resonate in some way, that may be consonant or dissonant. Reducing a large amount of information to find the essence in something or to expand a key aspect to see it in a different way.
<i>Clustering</i>	Using your felt resonance, grouping together words, images or elements into clusters.
<i>Bracketing-in</i>	Choosing to bring in something resonant, in service of the inquirer/ inquiry.

<i>Bracketing-out</i>	Choosing to hold something aside, either momentarily or not, in service of the inquirer/ inquiry.
<i>Finding a Felt Sense</i>	Connecting to the feelings within your body, internally tuning in.
<i>Intersubjective Response</i>	A response from the companion to the inquirer. Something of resonance that stays with the companion that may further the inquiry.
<i>Representations</i>	Multi-modal, art based expressions
<i>Themes/ Thematic Statement</i>	An articulation of a pattern of lived experiencing.
<i>Mapping</i>	A series of questions, explored emergently to 'flesh out' the key components of a topic of inquiry, or pattern of experiencing.

Paradigms

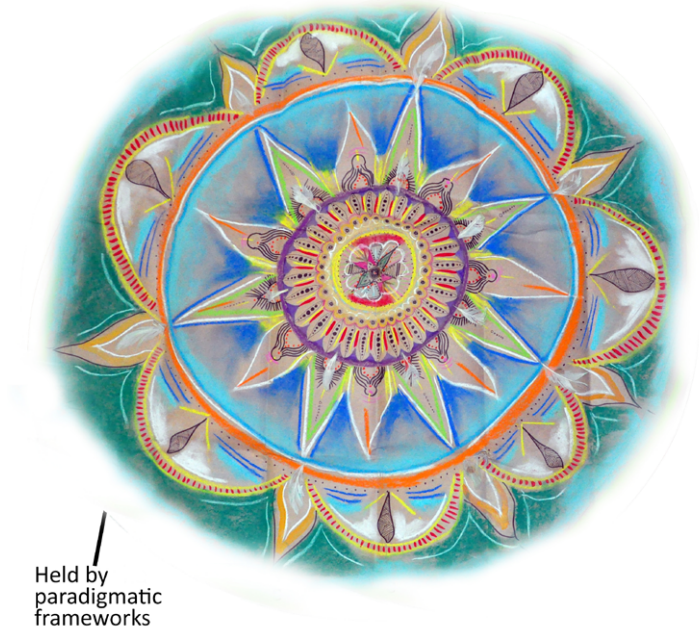


Figure 7: Paradigms

This qualitative research is situated somewhere between a postmodern and a post positivist world view. 'Postmodern Emergence' values multiple ways of knowing and is constantly shifting. Post Positive research and heuristic

research seek to articulate phenomena (objective experiences of reality), and value structure and common themes.

I am drawn to the openness of post modern research and its emphasis on co-constructed realities and the liminal: the threshold; the unknown space between one context and another; the void. Emergent research opens us infinite possibilities and to “radical transformations, making spaces for existential doubts and uncertainties” (Somerville, 2007, pp. 226-232). I simultaneously value intersubjectivity and uncovering grounded universal shared understandings, using the structure of a set of procedures as a way to come to knowing. This research approach is one of curiously moving inwards to look closer and moving outward to see patterns and threads of meaning.

Formatting

Participants direct quotes during the workshop are shown in *italics*.

My reflexive voice throughout is also represented in *italics*.

Keywords selected in-text are underlined or circled.

A collection or cluster of keywords are indented and represented in *italics* .



Creative Arts Practice

In my creative arts practice I work individually and with groups of children, young people and adults. I currently work with a Not-For-Profit organisation that aims to improve the lives of children and young people in out-of-home care; including residential care, foster care and kinship care.

Our team works with participants to build connection, to empower children and young people and to impact change in the child protection system. We create opportunities for the voice of children and young people in care to be heard, by facilitating workshops and advocating for policy change for children and young people in out-of-home care. In my role as a community facilitator I plan, coordinate and facilitate statewide events for families, children, young people, carers and case workers.

I also plan and facilitate leadership and advocacy training for young people with an out-of-home care experience. Individuals' experiences are fostered and heard so that they can transform their story into something that can

be grounds for systemic change. It is about the service users sharing their personal experience in order to impact change systemically. Their story is the catalyst for positive change. This change is lead by the young people who are directly impacted by the system.

I also practice privately, seeing clients one-on-one and facilitating workshops using a focus of creativity for wellbeing. These include short courses and workshops for adults in creative journaling, vision board creation and terrarium making with a focus on self-care.

Accessing a meaningful moment of experiencing

To begin our research, my supervisor invites me to reflect on the following questions in our supervision group in order to access a meaningful moment.

Where am I most alive?

What is meaningful in my practice?

I am grateful for the questions, because I am not yet sure what my research will be about, and am unsure how to begin. With these questions, I can quickly access a recent meaningful moment.

I recently ran a workshop with young people in out-of-home care, focusing on leadership and advocacy. That night, I find a 'selfie' on my phone, of one of the young people that I met that day. She had sneakily picked up my phone while I wasn't looking and took a photo of herself for me to find. This makes me smile. I want to believe she is reaching out, using humour to create a connection with me. I also want to believe this is a confirmation that I

have successfully made a connection with her. I value the building of trust and safety in groups, of supporting people to have a voice and connect. This 'selfie' gives me hope.

My supervision group offers me the following keywords after sharing this moment.

Finding a connection point, developing rapport, meaningfulness, anchoring, trust, stability, considered, skills involved in facilitating, connection, strengths, communicating compassionately, genuine presence.

I then set out to represent this moment; I find a shoe amongst the mountains of creative materials that are sprawled unevenly on the shelves of the art room. I put on the shoe to connect with what this experience was like for the young person. I still wear my own shoe on the other foot. One foot in her experience and one in mine, as I gather paint and a brush.

I am painting my felt-sense of connection; spirals of red, yellow, orange, the warmth and energy I feel in my stomach (Figure 8).



Figure 8: *Safety*

The center holds the connection of the group, gold tinsel, a candle and the word 'safety'. I glue pieces of fabric around the edge of the circle, representing people. Each

person is contributing to the connection, to a greater shared meaning.

I sew red wool around the edges of the circle and through a cardboard hoop. It is a tricky process, the thread is getting stuck and knotted. It reminds me of the tricky, fumbling process of a group coming together. It doesn't always go smoothly. The hoop is movable but connected to the circle underneath it. I move the hoop above the image, showing its flexibility and connection (Figure 10).



Figure 9: Safety II



Figure 10: Hoop

As I share this representation with the supervision group, they take down the following keywords and share a description of what they see.

Comfort, gold, fun, exciting, meaningful, shared purpose, giving hope, mixing pot of everyone's intention, common meaning, tying, holding, weaving, patience, tangled, carefully, safety, empathy, understanding, compassion, swirling colours, circular base, yellow, red, gold, tangled. Stitches, circle in a circle in a circle in a circle, openings, holes, movable, feathers, exactly in the centre, circle, candle, safety, magic in the centre.

Safety is central to this representation. This is an important and healthy component to foster a space for expression, growth and development. Creating a safe space to explore the unknown in a group can lead co-creating the group experience together. Once safety is established, how does one navigate exploring their edges while being witnessed by others? In the following section I will take this question and inquire into a meaningful moment of experiencing.



Inquiry into a Moment of Experiencing

Representing a Moment

I am grateful for a companion to support me in my inquiry. Cara supports me with her presence and gentle curiosity.

I look at what I have created so far. I don't know where to go next. Cara suggests using the process of inquiring into a micro-moment of experiencing. Stern (2004), describes noticing and being present to an ordinary moment so that we may find our "vision of daily experience... enriched" and that the unexpected novelty of an everyday moment can "reflect larger behavioral and psychological patterns" (pp. 9-18).

I select to represent the everyday moment: waking up. In the three seconds upon waking I remember a seminal experience yesterday that took me to an edge. I recognize this seminal experience as important to the inquiry, however I do not feel it is necessary to disclose the details of this new and overwhelming experience. Instead I am

exploring my emotional experiencing of the moment upon waking up.

Art as a form of inquiry allows me to explore meaningful patterns and themes related to this experience in a safe, non-exposing way. My choices around what to make explicit here and what to bracket out reflect my values around personal safety, while still offering you a window into my emotional experiencing.

My research process is reflecting my research content. I am finding a way of exploring my edges through communicating my process safely. Simultaneously my content is about exploring my experiences of the edges of safety. My knowing has only unfolded through companioning with another, understanding myself in a relational context, while using the structure of the procedures. Entering into a moment of my experiencing that feels overwhelming requires safety, structure and trust. I am finding that I can feel safe while being companioned, witnessed and supported relationally, so that I can explore

the unknown or lesser known and come to meaning.

I represent the moment of waking using pastels (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Stern Moment

The moment begins upon waking. I am snuggled in my soft feather doona, still in a dreamy state of floaty bliss (translucent blue). *Wait*. Am I forgetting something? (green). The strong red lines arise next as a memory from yesterday surfaces in flashes bringing anxiety and a tense feeling in my stomach. The yellow lines come in like a sunset. I say to myself, "You're okay, it's all okay". I put on a piece of music that comforts me, shown in blue. The

moment lasted a total of three seconds. I feel overwhelmed and exposed revisiting this moment of remembering.

Cara's gentle encouragement – as I recollect the moment - helps me to stay with the process.

I notice the multiple voices emerging in this moment and amplify them (Figure 12).

Multiple Voices

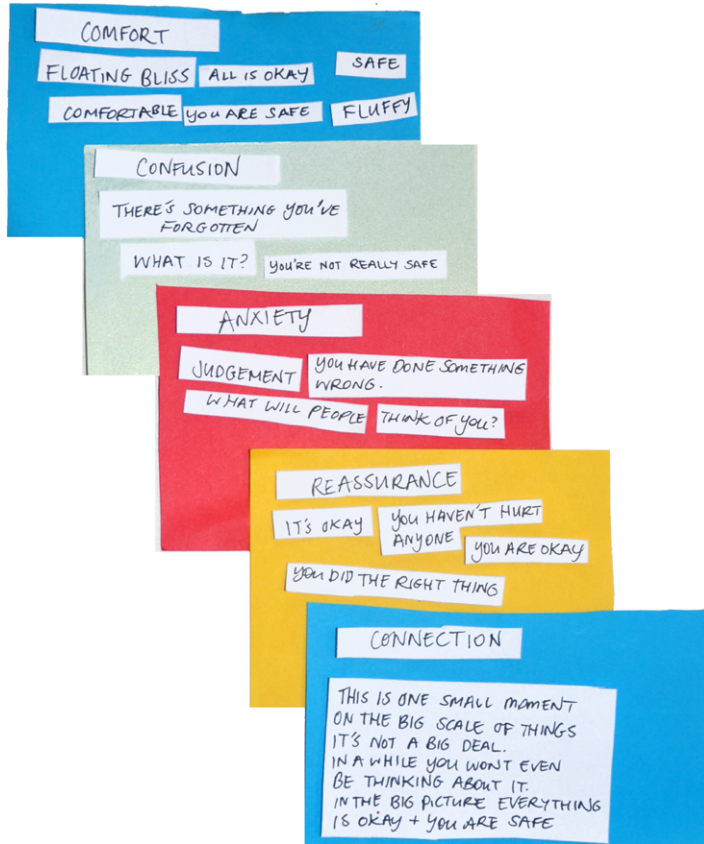


Figure 12: Multiple Voices

Keywords

The keywords and phrases Cara recorded throughout the inquiry are listed below.

I wonder what would happen if I let it be more alive? Merging elements. Just do something different. Unravel a little bit. The rope, it can get tangled. Constructed environment, underneath, frame, undoing, opening, predictable, tension, just sort of waking up. Just coming out of floating in timelessness, simple, comfortable, warm, content, blissful. Rolling in of all the memory, nervous and anxious, elastic band, self-judgment, red lines, remembering, overwhelming, fragmented, jumping into back and forward in time, flashes, pushing the edges, sense of self, trying to catch up, the siren, warning, crisis imminent, managing perceptions, tangled, separate, it's just not the same, floating in timelessness, comforting voice, it's okay, it's all good, you're okay. You have nowhere you have to be. Trevor Hall music – "The

Promised Land"

"Sometimes I don't feel at home, like exodus in my own soul. And I want to return. And I want to return. And I want to return. Can you love it unconditional my friend?" (Hall, 2014, track 6)

Contained, held, physical sensation comforting, known, safety within the structure, comforting, perspective, connecting to something greater, bigger than me, integrated.

I formed a reduction of the keywords that felt most meaningful from my inquiry so far (Figure 13).

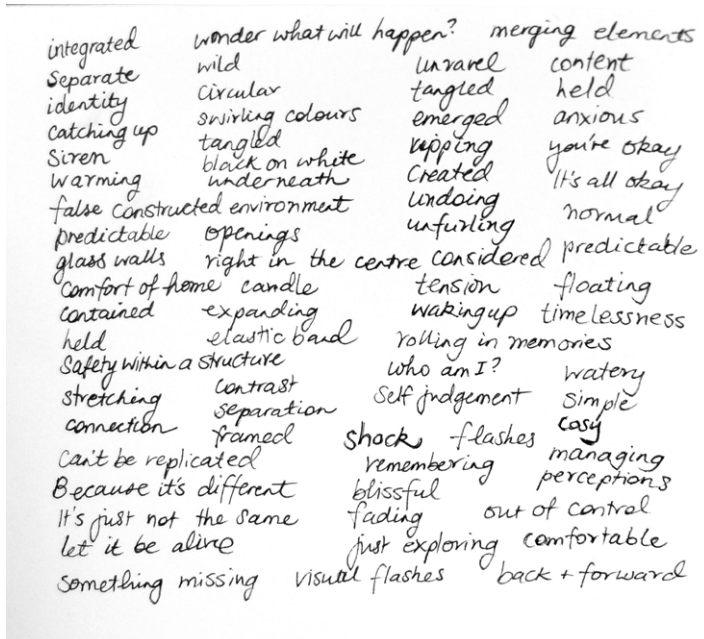


Figure 13: Reduction of Keywords

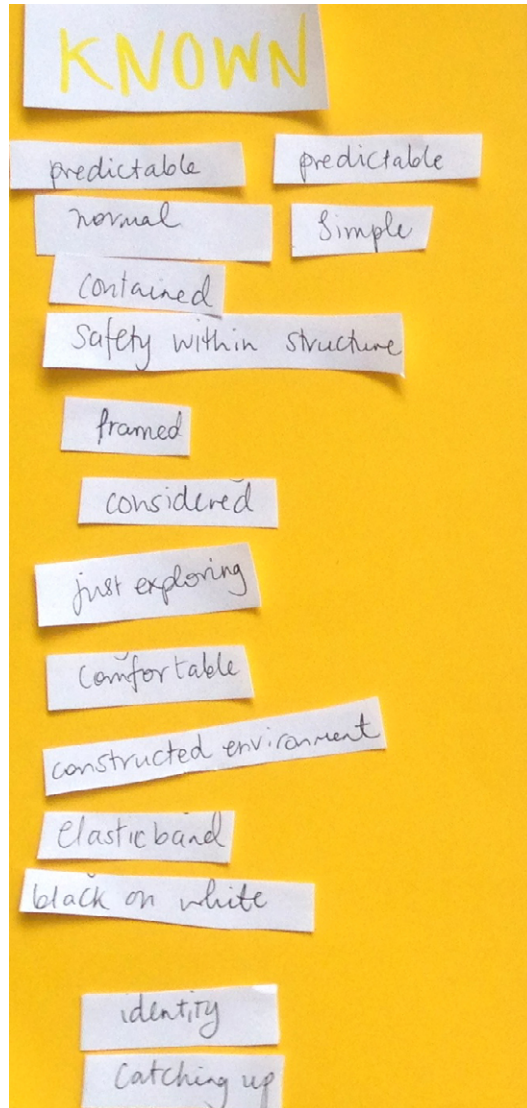


Figure 15: Known Cluster

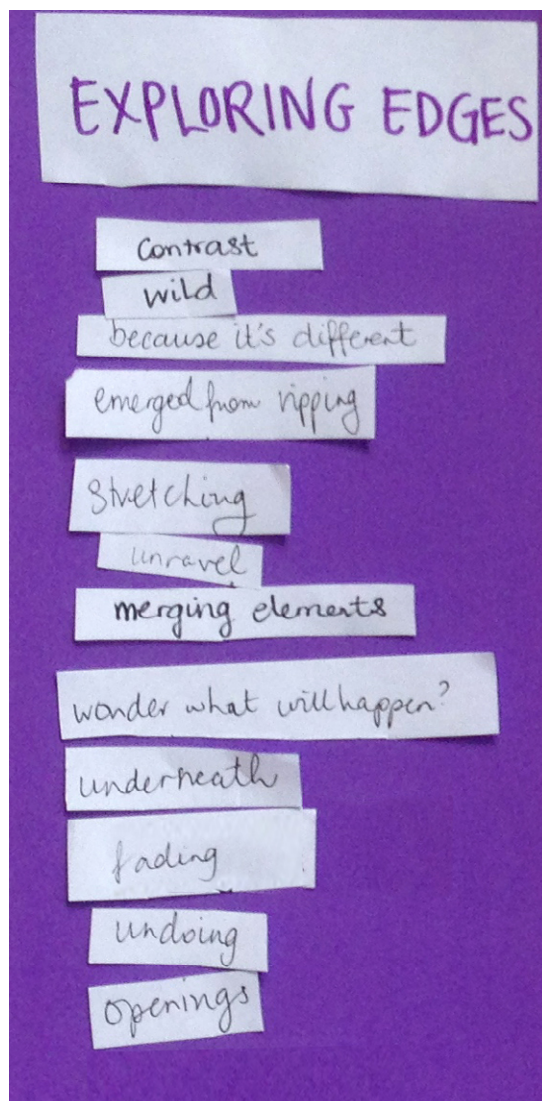


Figure 16: Exploring Edges Cluster

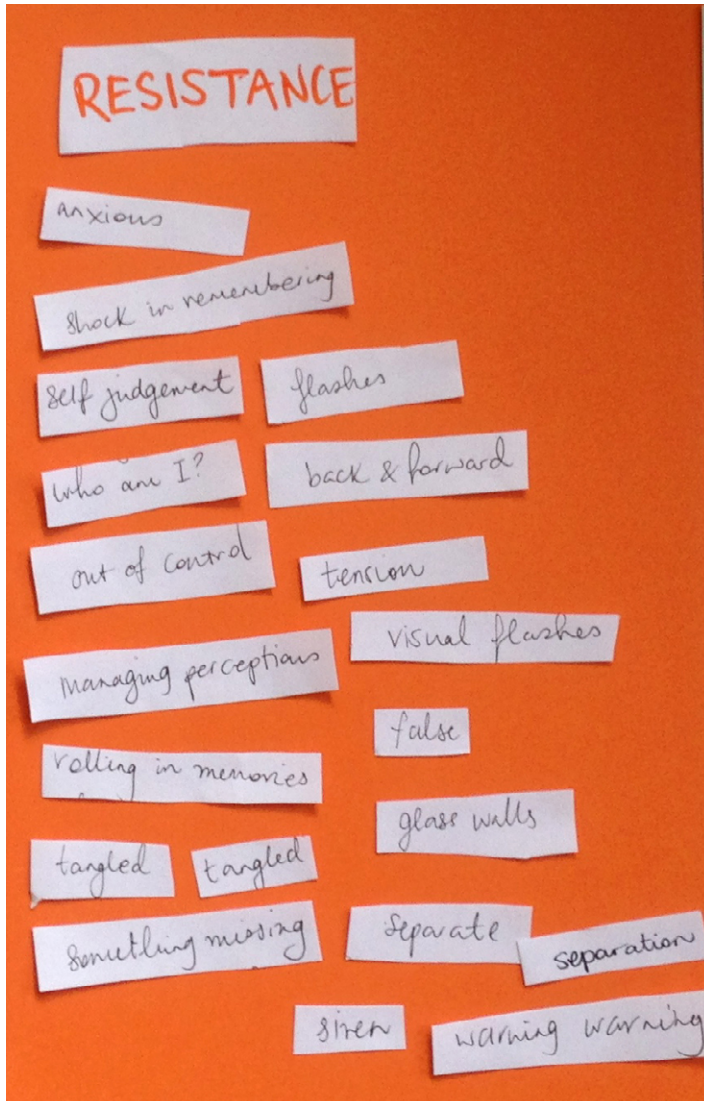


Figure 17: Resistance Cluster

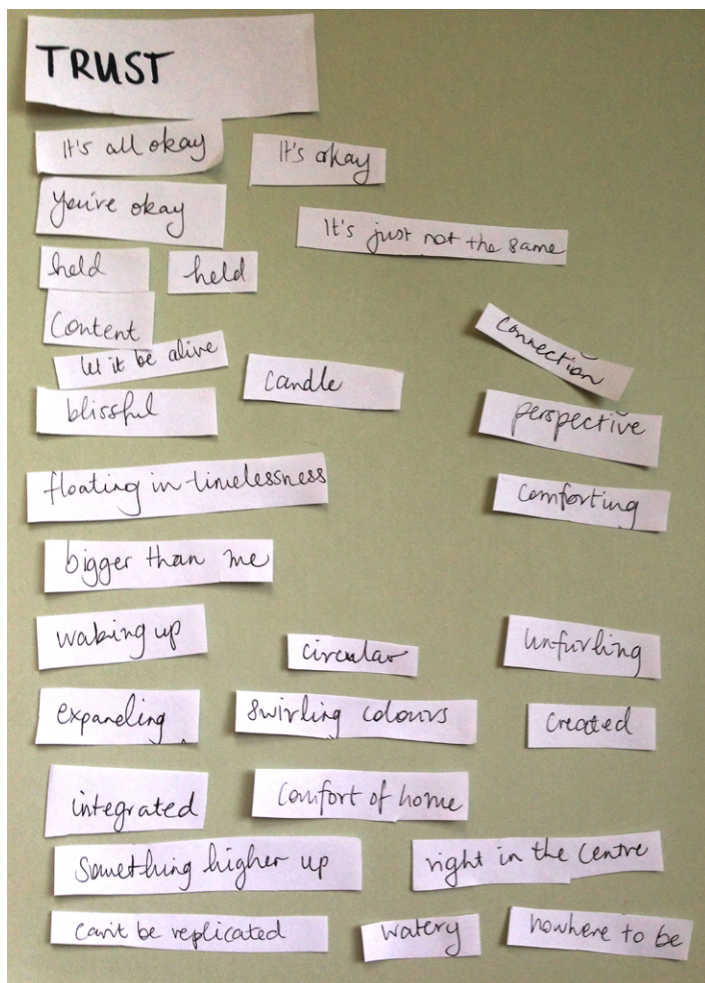


Figure 18: Trust Cluster

Reflections

I sense that these clusters are important, and I want to know more, so I make a representation of the four clusters together, using a reduction of the keywords from each cluster, within a circle, (Figure 19).



Figure 19: Representation of Clusters

I notice this is not the first time I have created using a circle. This 'representation of clusters' uses keywords from the four clusters, moving outwards to inwards. This could be a continual journey of moving in and out of each stage, looping back and repeating. Transitions between each stage are not always smooth. The outer circle shows the 'known' cluster, from here we move inwards to the 'exploring the edges' cluster. When exploring the edges, the unknown can feel uncertain and uncomfortable, the next circle is the 'resistance' cluster. If there is safety and trust in the process, we may move to the next cluster, trust. I am curious about each of these clusters. I follow my curiosity so that I may access a deeper knowing of how these clusters arise, and begin to plan my workshop for three participants from my class.



Workshop: Safety, Edges & Growth

Curiosity invites me to facilitate a workshop for three participants, exploring personal experiences of safety and being 'at your edge'. I have included a summary of the workshop here, however the full details are included in the Appendix.

I set up cushions in a circle on the carpet, art materials in the center, framed by flowing white material. The sun streams through the window creating warmth. This setup feels significant in creating a safe place, like a mandala, for the group to explore safety and their edges (Figure 20).

In order to create safety for the group, I offer transparency about my process. I share that I am exploring my personal edges and how to hold emotional and psychological safety while navigating the process of growth. I bring qualities of presence, receptivity and openness, attending to both my inner experiencing and the experiencing of the participants during the workshop. I am nervous and at my edge in

offering this workshop. I share with my participants that I am exploring safety, edges, growth and transformation.

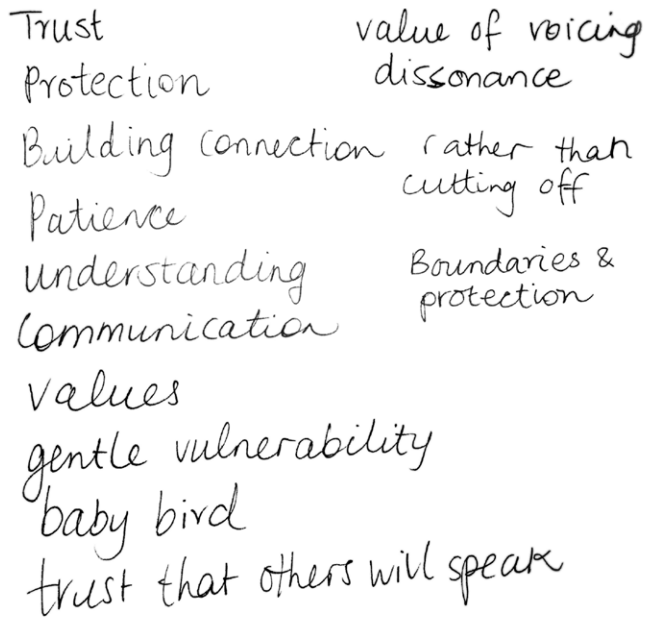
'Safety' and 'growth' are often in conflict for me. I wish to inquire into creating safety in groups to support participants to explore their edges. I am offering this workshop to provide an opportunity to explore safety and for the participants to share something with the group that might bring them to their own edges.



Figure 20: Workshop Layout

'Safety'

Together we speak about our experience of safety in groups. I write keywords from the group sharing (Figure 21).



A collection of handwritten keywords in cursive script, arranged in two columns. The left column contains: Trust, Protection, Building connection, Patience, understanding, Communication, values, gentle vulnerability, baby bird, and trust that others will speak. The right column contains: value of voicing, dissonance, rather than cutting off, and Boundaries & protection.

Trust
Protection
Building connection
Patience
understanding
Communication
values
gentle vulnerability
baby bird
trust that others will speak

value of voicing
dissonance
rather than
cutting off
Boundaries &
protection

Figure 21: Safety Keywords

The participants then take time to individually create their representations about safety. Each created an image

and offered up reflections on their own images as well as responses to the images of other participants in the group.

'At the edge'

Next is the invitation to share for 2 minutes, in any modality they choose, something that is an 'edge' for them. I give them two minutes only, hoping the structure of time will create a safe boundary. They all want to share, yet are nervous. I notice constriction in my breathing and a hesitation to continue. Asking them to explore their edges is edgy for me too. I don't want to push them or pressure them. I am afraid they won't want to do it. I take a moment to ask myself: What is the value of this process? I conclude that it's a valuable opportunity for them to be witnessed and seen.

Connecting to the bigger picture (like I did earlier, in the moment of waking up) restores my confidence and helps me to trust in the process and continue.

I noticed that though the workshop content related to safety and being at one's edge, the richest source of data was gleaned from my own experience of creating safety for participants in the group and being 'on the edge' as I

facilitated. The group was a true example of the research content emerging in process. The following are direct quotes from participants and key elements that emerged from the workshop, that have informed my research:

Familiarity helps to build safety

Boundaries help to protect vulnerability

Angel wings to me mean having faith, reminds me of an angel standing on the edge of a cliff and being safe. If you have your wings, these are your protection/safety to take the leap into the unknown

I choose to share, coming up to the edges and not hiding my vulnerability or my shadows

I feel a sense of relief once expressing what it feels like being on the edge

The edge? I approach with gentle vulnerability trusting my wings

I know there is value and the opportunity for growth in being on the edge. I have a choice

Reflections

There are several reflections that I am left with after the workshop;

Structuring in time and space for a session can assist to create safe boundaries and enable spaciousness for processing and reflection.

Asking people to express their edge feels edgy for me.

I am grateful that we did the edge activity, instead of backing away from my personal edge & staying safe.

There is value in exploring edges. It offers a potential for growth, relief and a sense of accomplishment.

Creating safety requires connecting to the meaning and purpose of going to the edge.

Safety is cultivated in relationship to others through familiarity and comfort.

I notice a change in the group over the course of the workshop – especially after we expressed our ‘edges’. There seemed to be more intimacy, a closeness and familiarity. It reminds me of my representation of safety; of the gold swirl in the middle (Figure 8). Connection is created through the process of navigating the edges. There is value in sharing vulnerability relationally and being witnessed in a supportive and held way. By choosing to ‘stay with’ discomfort, the opportunity arises, to become more comfortable with it.

Reflexivity

The inquiry is currently relating to my life. For years I have been navigating safety and growth as core values and needs, finding many ways to push my edges and expand while feeling resistance and fear in the process of growth. I have been learning ways to push myself to the edges safely (though it still feels uncomfortable each time!).

I'm learning to trust in the process of emergence; of coming to meaning.

I recently completed a singing course for the first time. At the end of the course I performed a cover song and played guitar in front of a large audience. I had never played guitar before this and never sung on stage. This felt like a big step for me, getting on stage and being witnessed at my edge.

The next edge is writing my own song.



Layers of Inquiry

Making sense of the data

I re-enter the inquiry process some time later, with Cara by my side again. I gather everything I have explored and come to know so far. What does this all mean? I am especially curious as to how I can possibly represent so much embodied experiencing in a way that is both authentic and academically rigorous. The afternoon sun is streaming through the window, chocolate nearby and all of my books, journals, artwork and representations are scattered across the lounge. The curious eyes of house mates gaze over me as they walk by.

There are over two hundred keywords I've written onto small pieces of paper, taken from the entirety of my research write-up so far. I reduce these, bracketing in my felt-sense to assist me to select keywords resonated with my inquiry topic. The image is included to illustrate the process, not the content (Figure 22).

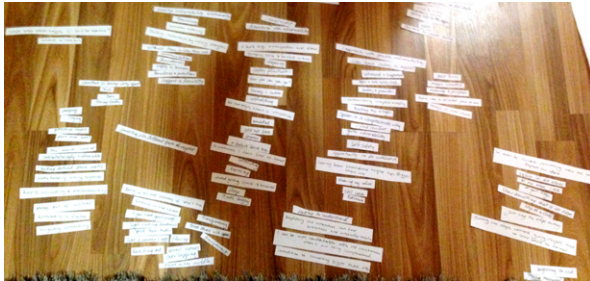


Figure 22: Keywords Clustering

I cluster the remaining keywords into five groups, intuitively grouping words that hold similar resonance for me (Figure 23 - Figure 27). I title these clusters and find that the clusters make sense to me in order, showing me the consecutive stages of 'Invitation', 'Relational safety', 'Edge', 'Trust/Release' and 'Meaning'.



Figure 23: Invitation cluster



Figure 24: Relational Safety Clusters

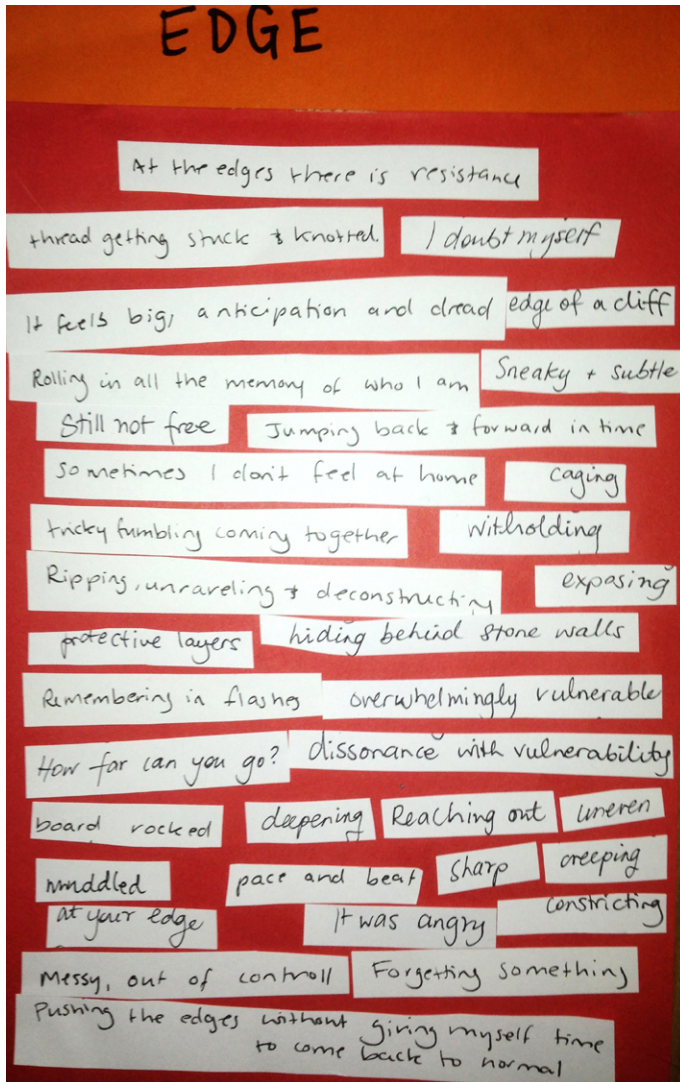


Figure 25: Edge Cluster

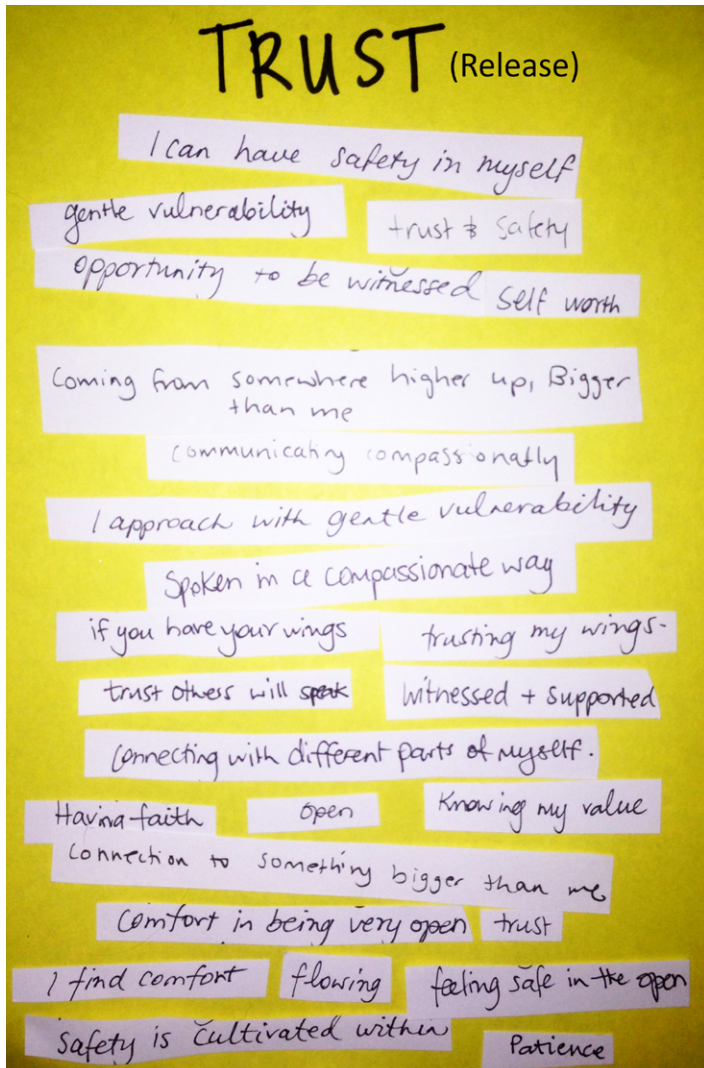


Figure 26: Trust (Release) Cluster

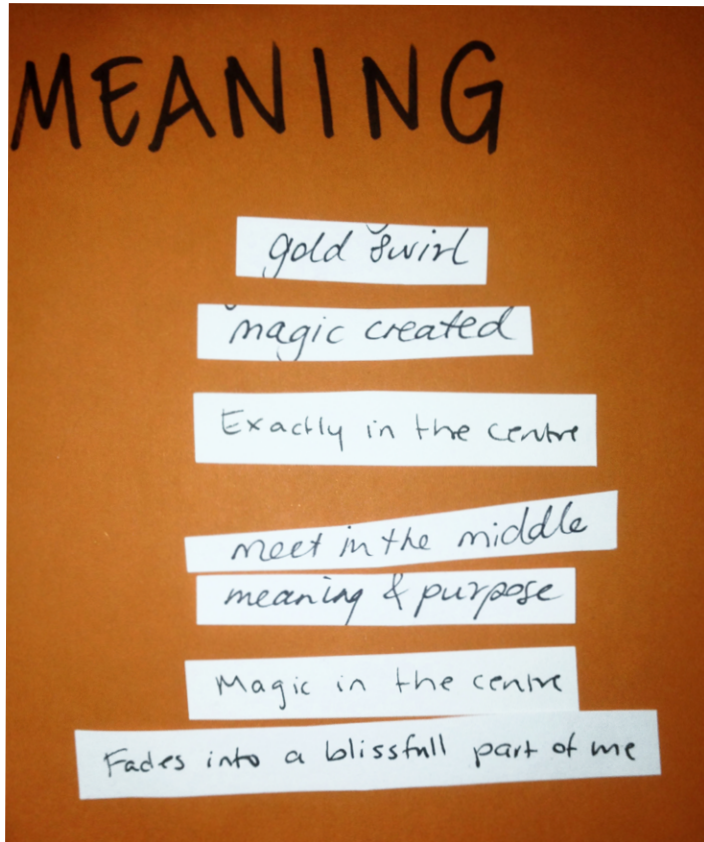


Figure 27: Meaning Cluster

I feel stuck again. Cara suggests I choose one cluster to explore more deeply. I can't decide between the 'edge' and 'trust' clusters. I am curious what is in the space between the two?

It begins ...as a mystery

I don't know much about it yet so I temporarily call this liminal space 'the space between'.

'The space between' companions me to deeper knowing of how to navigate the edge. I introduce an additional cluster of keywords from conversations with Cara about this 'space between' cluster. As I come to know more about this cluster I name it 'taking the Leap (The Space Between)' (Figure 28).

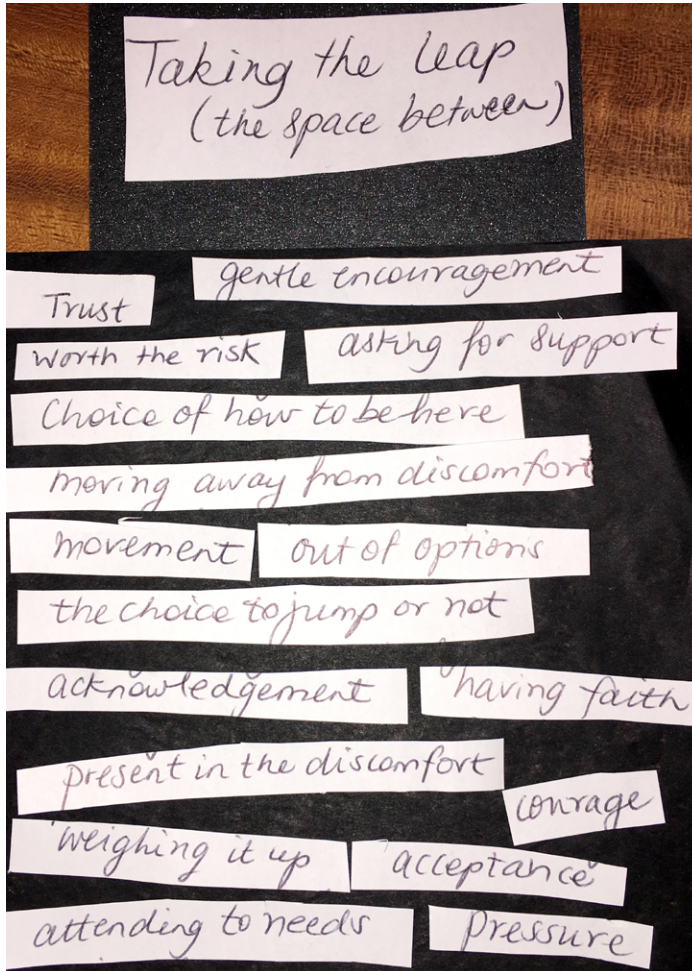


Figure 28: Taking the Leap Cluster (The Space Between)

Sitting with this new cluster, 'trust' and 'courage' are two keywords that stand out to me as essential to taking the leap. I don't *only* experience trust once I am on the other side of 'edge'. I need 'trust' in order to take the leap! With this new knowing, I re-name the 'trust' cluster 'release' as it feels a more accurate title for the release and relief I experience once I am no longer on the edge.

Amplification

Okay so that's done.

What next?

I am stuck again.

I feel a familiar embodied experience of resistance; afraid to move forward and yet knowing I value growth. I wish for a more easeful passage into this unknown; a way to go beyond the 'edge' and reach 'release', without it being so excruciating!

I have no idea how to find a preferred way of being.

I could try exploring the resistance, but it feels like a merry-go-round.

I don't want to stay here in the resistance.

I want to find a way through.

Cara suggests that I write from 'the space between' and see what I can find out about the landscape there. I close my eyes and take a deep breath.

I listen to the sounds around me.

I become present.

I imagine that I am the 'Space Between' (Taking the leap cluster) .

I am in the darkness.

Once I feel connected to this space, I begin to write, bracketing in the two clusters 'edge' and 'release' either side. I connect to my desire to get to know this unknown space between. I don't know where the writing comes from (Figure 29).

From The Space Between ('Taking the Leap' cluster)

I am the space between
The edge
and trust.
I hold possibility for new perspectives
I am invisible and hard to see
like a chasm with no visible bottom.
I offer pathways
If you can see with more than just your eyes.
Would you like to know more?
Come closer.
I whisper in rustles of wind and leaves
I murmur in grumbles of thunder and creaking trees.
I may have seen you before.
Each time I change form.
There is a way through me
To the other side.
Do you choose to venture?
Or would you like to remain where you are?
I see your knotted knees, muddled mind
I am holding out a hand. Inviting you through.
I smile and chuckle,
I know the value of me.
Come join me, and see what's on the other side

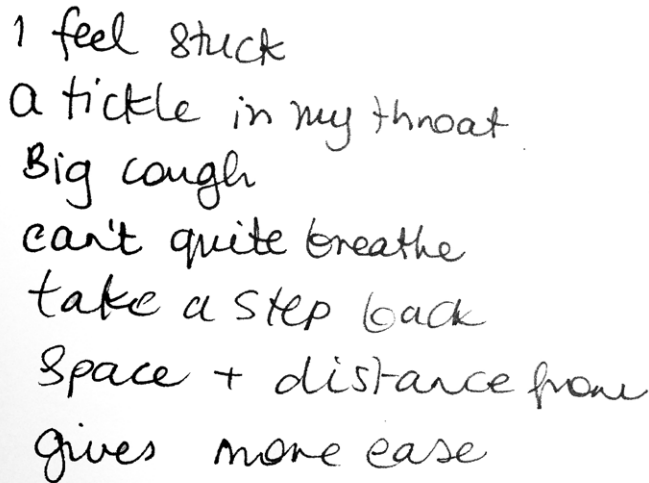
1 poem from the space between... 10/10/15

Figure 29: Writing from 'The Space Between'

The writing is comforting.

A black hole of unknown now has an enticing, humorous character!

I am intrigued, yet stuck again (sigh).



I feel stuck
a tickle in my throat
Big cough
can't quite breathe
take a step back
Space + distance from
gives more ease

Figure 30: Embodied Experience Reflection

I notice an embodied sensation, so I make some notes in my journal (Figure 30).

I want to make sense of how this familiar embodied

experience has been playing out, so I use the procedure of mapping to gain more insight (Figure 31).

Mapping

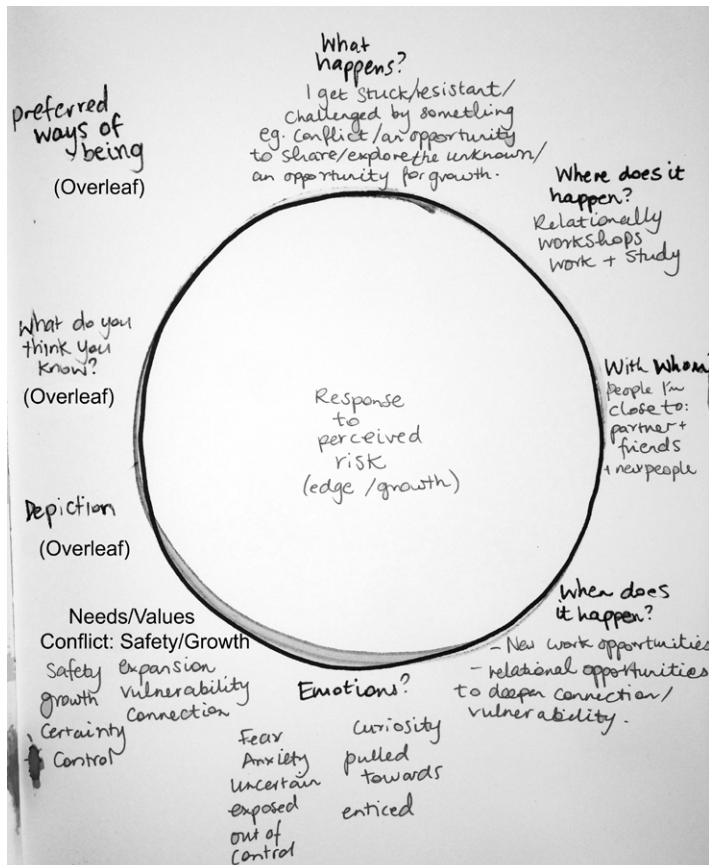


Figure 31: Mapping

Depiction

When I am presented with new opportunities for growth, challenges or conflicts in relationships or in my work, I often feel fearful, anxious, uncertain, exposed and out of control. I also feel pulled towards staying with what is present. I feel enticed and curious because I value growth and connection, expansion and vulnerability. I experience internal conflict, as I also need safety, certainty and control. I make choices in these moments based on how safe I feel to continue. In the times I have chosen to continue, I have experienced a sense of expansiveness, connection to others and myself. The emotional experience of internal conflict throughout this process is unpleasant, even if it leads to more pleasant experiences.

What I think I know now

There are similarities that have emerged both times I have clustered my keywords. Seeing the threads in the clusters is both affirming and frustrating.

I want some more clarity.

This feels like I am running around through a maze and finding the same dead ends again. I found some treasure in this place the first time, but now it is not so new.

A heavy, dark familiarity arises as I see the red and white cluster titled the 'edge'. Here I am again.

I've been here before and I am frustrated to still be experiencing this.

Preferred ways of being

What if there were another way? Maybe I could find a different entry point or a different approach? I know I want to find another way, not to experience this:

Stuck, knotted, blocked, numb in my hands, shallow breathing. I would like to explore a preferred way of being here that feels more easeful.

Representation of 'The Space Between'

I create a clay representation of the space between (Figure 32) and describe what I see, before beginning a written dialogue with it.



Figure 32: 'The Space Between'

Description

Smooth long curved, four protuberances, attached to main area. Suspended, shallow holes/dents.

Two green stones with small holes. Smooth white hard curved shape, not like the rest. See through hole. Taller thin curved shape, highest point, angled. Wider than it is tall. Curved indents repeated in a line around the larger thin curved tall part. Two parts touching the board beneath it.

Dialogue with the Space Between

What are you called?

I don't have a name, I keep changing form. You can call me, 'the space between'.

What can you see?

I can see in all directions, I can move around. I have legs. I can see that there are many obstacles. Ups and downs, curves and objects that obscure vision. There is possibility up and over and around those things. The mirrors I see reflect what is beyond this space. The sunshine, green fresh leaves and soft breeze are just beyond reach, but it

is possible to get there. I know you get stuck because you can't quite see what is beyond that which is right in front of you.

What can help me to navigate your space?

I am comfortable here because I know things are not always what they seem, especially when you are looking from underneath. You need to draw on what you have. My legs help me get around. I can leap, I am flexible, I can move and jump and scurry and dive beneath, around and over. It's a joyful dance and I know that my body can carry me through the terrain. You have what you need to carry yourself through my terrain. You've been here before. Even if it seems different.

What is that hard white thing on you?

In my mouth a shell lays. It contains space. I can catch raindrops, feeding myself sustenance for my strength and suppleness. You must feed yourself to strengthen yourself for the journey through. You must create space and a way

to hold things you will gain in the journey through.

I'm scared. What is it that helps you trust yourself?

Keep moving, keep strengthening, you will know you can trust yourself the more you keep moving. Your ability to be in this space between will develop, your skill will increase. You will become more flexible and supple; shifting and changing like the wind, the sea, the sand. It is your natural state, one of flow, surrendered to the change within you and around you.

I reflect on the process of creating the representation and what I notice;

He comes into my field in clumps and lengths, he has no eyes. He needs them (so I add eyes). He reminds me of the sea. A seashell forms a tongue, a bowl and the holding space for possibility. There is a way through the space between. He moves, shifts and changes form as I create him.

Keywords

I reduce the dialogue to keywords (underlined) that most resonate with me and create an essence statement.

Essence Statement

There are many obstacles that obscure vision.

*When things are not as they seem and you can't
quite see what is beyond... what will help?*

Flexibility.

To dive beneath, around and over,

*Like a joyful dance, your body can carry you
through.*

Feed yourself and strengthen yourself.

Create space.

Keep moving.

Keep strengthening.

Trust.

Keep moving.

It is your natural state of flow.

The dialogue with 'the space between' is so helpful; the focus is on flexibility, ability to adapt, change and move. Repetition builds strength and trust. I must build strength through feeding myself and build flexibility through moving my body. It feels significant. I hope this new knowing will help me to choose routines that build both physical and emotional flexibility and strength. Tonight I will go to yoga.

I want to write a song and put it to guitar.

This is something that I have not done before and I am terrified... So I take a step towards the edge again and tentatively put together a song using the keywords from 'the space between'. I record the song on my phone and listen to it. It's not quite right yet but I am so proud. I did it! I've wanted to do it for years, but I've been so stuck.

I feel lighter.

I am more confident, stronger, more courageous, gutsy, trusting, open. My muscles feel supple. I have energy running through my hands and arms, warm and energised. I am at ease & grateful for the mystery. It is such a relief! Maybe I will share the song with others, but for now just the lyrics of the song are shown overleaf.

The Space Between (A song)

*When things are tangled and stuck
And you can't find a way through
Create some space*

*When you freeze up in fear
And you can't see a way through
Create some space
Create space x2
Create some space*

*When you freeze up in fear
And you can't feel a way through
Keep moving
Keep moving x3*

*Like a joyful dance, your body
Can carry you through
Keep moving x3
Keep moving x2
Create some space.*

The Presentation

For the end of year presentation of my research I am invited to represent multi-modally what I have come to know. I create a representation of the experience of the edge, navigating 'the space between' and invite my classmates to engage in it with me.

I create a journey up the stairs into a small room known as 'the library'. This space calls to me as it is contained, hidden away and offers me privacy as I prepare. I set-up the space by covering the window and door with fabric, so even as people walk past, they can't see me. This feels great, safe and contained. I attend to creating safety so that I can explore my edges.

I want my classmates to experience the process of navigating the edge, to give them a sense of how difficult this space can be and how much flexibility you need to be able to find your way through. I make an obstacle course, up the stairs and through the doorway to reach the library, a small attic. I use elastic, rope, netting and chairs to create barriers in which people have to climb over, crawl under and move around. In order to reach me, they have

to navigate the obstacle course. Along the path, I place messages: keywords from the clusters and the dialogue with 'the space between'. I am upstairs in the library, while everyone is in the room below. Not everyone can see me up here; my head is visible through the square window overlooking the room (Figure 33).



Figure 33: Reading the Artist's Statement

I begin the presentation by reading my artist's statement 'A journey of navigating safety, the edge and growth'.

Artist's Statement

A journey of navigating safety, the edge & growth

I don't want to be seen.

Conflict between wanting to be free and not wanting to be seen, exposed as not enough. I keep getting stuck, going round in circles. I am driven by growth, learning and becoming, so I am constantly finding myself in situations that challenge me. Whether it be navigating conflict, standing up for myself relationally, or showing up in front of people where I am the centre of attention.

I find this edge really excruciating. At the edge I experience overwhelm and I forget why I would even want to do this to myself. I feel like it's too much and I crave safety and comfort.

I want to run away. But something keeps me, pulls me, because I know, on the other side is

growth and trust in my ability to hold myself in experiencing the unknown. It is liberation from the fear.

I am curious about the space between; between the edge and trust, openness and growth. How do I navigate this space with more ease and safety? How do I get to the other side? How can I find more easefulness in the process? Why does it have to be so excruciating? It still feels uncomfortable, especially being seen.

When I spoke with the space between, it told me that to get to the other side, I needed to be flexible, to be adaptable, so I could see different perspectives.

I invite you to navigate the space, with flexibility, noticing and paying attention to the messages along the way.

Be careful, this space can be dangerous!"

I wait in the library while everyone slowly navigates the obstacle course to join me (Figure 34).



Figure 34: Obstacle Course

I enjoy hearing the sounds of people coming up the stairs, even though I can't see them yet. I feel empathy for the difficulty of the journey; they are with me, alongside me. Having them with me brings humour to the experience as I hear them laugh and cringe as they get tangled. I smile, watching each person coming in one by one on all fours. Instead of having a crowd of people looking at me, I am able to connect with each person individually. This helps me to feel safe. Everyone arrives and squishes in with me in

the library. I read out an explanation of my song:

These words of comfort come to me from the space
between. From these words, I formed my first song.
From my safe space up here, I share another edge. In my
trepidation, I share with you this song that came from 'the
space between'.

I softly sing the song and tentatively play the guitar I have
hardly any experience playing. My voice is shaking, my
hands are shaking and I am burning hot. I feel exposed, but
it is *my choice*, on my terms. I am okay in this discomfort; it
is meaningful and powerful to be showing my vulnerability
(Figure 35). To listen to the song from 'the space between'
see: <http://bit.ly/SongSpaceBtwn>



Figure 35: Singing from 'The Space Between'

I note feelings and thoughts of this experience in my journal after the performance.

I feel so satisfied, happy and proud of myself. I sang my song! I feel so expansive, at ease and free. I can handle this. Life is pretty grand, pretty beautiful. Connection, seeing and being seen is beautiful. I've come out the other side and it is pretty great!

Reflections

After the experience of the presentation, I represent my emotional journey visually using watercolour and pen (Figure 36). The sharp repetitive lines and intense colours on the left side of the image show the anticipation, anxiety and heightened energy I experienced. Towards the right hand side of the image, the colours blend and soften and the sharp lines gradually fade, showing the relief, release and sense of connection I experienced afterward.



Figure 36: *Emotional experiencing of the presentation*

I create a representation of the 'Release' cluster (Figure 37) and dialogue with it (Figure 38). I reduce this to keywords and form an essence statement (Figure 39).

I am comforted and reassured by 'Grace'. By taking steps to the edge and beyond I have arrived at this place of knowing.



Figure 37: Grace, A representation of 'Release' Cluster

hello, who are you?
I am grace and am gentleness and power.
I've shown up to remind you that you are
powerful. You are brave.
I am so proud of you:
This gentle vulnerability in you, and letting
yourself be seen - It's okay.
Remember when everyone started coming
in, and they were just people, your
friends, here with you on this journey, to
love + support you? Remember how
it was okay. They smiled and curled up
in this space with you. Present and enjoying
the experience. Not here to judge you but
to be with you. And you were okay, in
fact you enjoyed it. I was there too, with
you. The comfort and ease in being seen.
Without the fight + run. Without the
push or the urgency.
The gentle being-ness. That's who I am.

Figure 38: Dialogue with Grace (keywords circled)

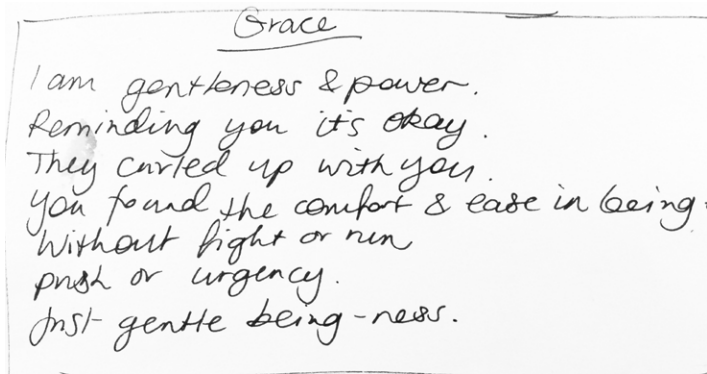


Figure 39: Essence Statement from Grace & 'Release' cluster

By following my intuitive resonances, I have experienced an alternative way of being. In the space between the 'edge' and 'release' I stayed with my experience while 'taking the leap' and attended to choices that enhanced my sense of safety, even at my 'edge'. I made it through to the other side! I can find ways to create more safety for myself by creating space and identifying empowered choices. I can be at the edge in a more easeful way, even if it is still challenging. Here I experience feelings of empowerment, pride, increased self-esteem, trust and freedom.



Findings

I find myself standing on the edge. It is my supervision session to support me to come to findings, and I'm on the edge of the ledge that spans the back wall of the large classroom, sun streaming through the tall windows behind me (Figure 40).



Figure 40: Standing on the Edge

My supervisor asked me to step up here, to embody the experience of the edge. I feel my stomach turn into a sucking vortex. I reluctantly oblige, resistant to the suggestion. From the edge I can see a wider view of the room, but immediately want to get down, feeling her eyes on me. The small movement from sitting next to her, to standing on the edge makes me so visible, so vulnerable. She asks me questions about my experience of this place. These questions and answers form a summary of my findings.

WHAT GETS ME MOVING?

I fear the unknown.

I want to be in control, to have certainty, to feel safe.

WHAT'S IN THE WAY OF LEAPING OFF THE EDGE?

I fear being witnessed and seen.

I fear letting go of what I know, the parts of myself that protect me.

I feel exposed.

WHAT MAKES ME FEEL UNSAFE HERE?

Acknowledging what I do have control over and taking action to create more safety.

I feel safe when I can attend to my needs physically and emotionally.

Connecting with the potential value of taking the risk vs. staying on the edge; weighing it up and creating more 'knowns' creates safety.

WHAT HELPS ME FEEL SAFE HERE?

Being present to my experiencing and attending to my needs helps me take the leap.

The pressure pushes me to jump. Taking the leap will give me freedom from the discomfort of being witnessed or judged.

Having faith and trusting that it is worth the risk, gives me strength to jump.

I need gentle encouragement from others or myself as well as courage, acknowledgment and acceptance.

'Come to the edge,' he said.

'We can't, we're afraid!' They responded.

'Come to the edge,' he said.

'We can't, we will fall!' They responded.

'Come to the edge,' he said.

And so they came.

And he pushed them.

And they flew.

(Logue, 1969, pp. 65-66)

I dive deep into books, images, films and other research, using the following four topics (derived from the answers above) as my guide (Figure 41). The following pages offer a deeper exploration of these topics.



Figure 41: Findings Topics

Empowered choice in the face of challenge

Our lives are constantly in a state of change and we are often faced with new challenges. This could be making a decision to step outside of what is known to take on something new: a new job, a new relationship, moving house, or learning a new skill. It also may be something that we have not chosen, like an ending of a relationship, losing a loved one, losing a job. It could be a crisis that forces us to adapt and change with the situation.

With each, there is often a period of grieving for what was, even when we are making choices to move towards something better. I am interested in the impact of empowered choice upon how we navigate and adjust to the changes and challenges that arise. How can we make empowered choices? What if we are in a situation we cannot control? How can we acknowledge the situation and find acceptance as a way through?

I've experienced great tension while navigating the edge, often followed by release and a deeper connection to meaning and purpose. Miller (2004) refers to Jung's description of the 'transcendent function' referring to the

driving force that is a tension between opposites. When there is conflict between conscious and unconscious material, the 'transcendent function' births something greater into awareness (p. 3).

It can arise when there is a standstill within us, when we are stuck and what we are doing in our life does not match up to unconscious needs, values or desires. When we can explore and give form to the unknown, unconscious aspects arising, something new can emerge. It may be a new attitude towards the situation, our lives, or how we identify with ourselves. The 'transcendent function' shares similarities with the conflict between growth and safety throughout my inquiry and what has emerged from this tension. Although I was already aware of the conflict between growth and safety, some new discoveries arose around using routine and flexibility to support me in navigating the edge.

I have identified many choices throughout my inquiry, sometimes choosing to step into the unknown even when I feel vulnerable and difficult emotions arise. At other times I have chosen to give myself space from the difficult

emotions and vulnerability, valuing emotional safety. At each moment, I have a choice whether to go towards, or move away from what challenges me. Just as one of the participants in my workshop describes of her experiencing, "I choose to share, coming up to the edges and not hiding my vulnerability or my shadows".

Brown (2012) asks if my choices are "comforting and nourishing my spirit, or are they temporary reprieves from vulnerability and difficult emotions ultimately diminishing my spirit?" (p. 147). Brown's question brings awareness to the reasons behind my choices. At different times, there will be different answers to what is nourishing to my spirit and this question gives me a tool for my decision making process, supporting me to differentiate whether to lean towards attending to my safety, or step into the vulnerability of growth.

When I am stuck at the edge, feeling overwhelmed, there are choices I can make to feel more empowered. I can take responsibility for my own actions, seek support and acknowledge and accept that there are things externally that I can't control. Rotter (1954) developed the 'Locus

of control scale', which measures the self-perception of control in one's life (pp. 105-183). It considers how much we feel we can impact and have control of our lives (internal locus of control), compared to how much our lives are controlled by forces external to us, such as environment, chance or fate (external locus of control). Existing on a sliding scale, this perception of control impacts on resilience, self-efficacy and feelings of empowerment (Harvey, 1974, p. 437; Pannells, 2008, pp. 67-71). A balance of internal and external locus of control; self-determination, self-awareness and reflection, increase one's ability to access empowered choices (Breeding, 2008, pp. 96-98). A participant from my workshop shared, "*I know there is value and the opportunity for growth in being on the edge. I have a choice.*" Identifying choices at the edge can build feelings safety and empowerment.

The Edge

I have a tendency to seek out growth in order to flourish. I am continuously finding myself at the edge of where I feel safe. I have jumped out of a plane, jumped off cliffs into rock pools and sailed through stormy seas while climbing a thirty-meter mast. I have slept at train stations in foreign countries and ridden a camel through the deserts of Africa. I have facilitated workshops for five hundred people and fallen in and out of love. I have sat with another experiencing psychosis; I've climbed mountains and surfed wild waves.

'The edge' is also a metaphor for my inner emotional experiencing. I find it excruciating being at the edge, where my comfort decreases and my fear increases. I often regret it once I get there, wishing I were somewhere else more safe. It might be excruciating in the short-term, but it increases my experiences of comfort in the long-term, meaning I experience more safety in a wider range of situations.

The moments following when I am no longer stuck on the edge, between two places, are particularly significant.

When I am enacting choice through decisive action there is a surge through my body like a tsunami, as the tension releases. Like letting go of a breath you didn't know you were holding. "When it feels scary to jump, that's exactly when you jump. Otherwise you end up staying the same place your whole life. And that I can't do" (Dodson & Chandor, 2014). Sharing the experience of the edge can help to increase safety, by seeking out support from others.

A participant from my workshop shared with the group. *"I experience a sense of relief once expressing what it feels like being on the edge"*. Another participant shared that *"Angel wings to me mean having faith, remind me of an angel standing on the edge of a cliff and being safe. If you have your wings, these are your protection/safety to take the leap into the unknown. The edge? I approach with gentle vulnerability trusting my wings"*.

One of my motivations to leap is to seek relief by moving away from the pain associated with being stuck. Navigating the edge requires a willingness and ability to be with discomfort.

When I'm in a difficult place, the creative process and art making support me to find comfort. I've been known to enthusiastically brush the paint onto the paper, ferociously transmuting the anxious energy from my body, through my hands, the brush and out. Relief and stillness follow the flurry. Through creative expression, I can process my emotional and unconscious material with acceptance and awareness. I then have greater access to inner resources. "There is a universal tendency to turn away from difficulty. Image making allows for staying with something while making that staying bearable enough through the pleasure available in the use of materials" (Allen, 1995, p. 17).

Courage

It takes courage and trust to step to my edge. Stepping off into the darkness of the unknown requires faith. Taking the leap off the edge develops inner strength and resilience.

When you walk to the edge of all the light you have
and take that first step into the darkness of the unknown,
you must believe that one of two things will happen:

There will be something solid for you to stand upon,
or, you will be taught how to fly

(Overton, 1975, para. 1)

I experience a shiver down my spine while I read this as my body remembers the anticipation and exhilaration of the edge. This speaks of the courage required to take the leap off the edge, trusting that something good will come from the risk, even in the face of fear and potential loss.

Relational Safety

Allen (1995) speaks about resistance and the critical voice that surfaces when you are doing something important and meaningful; “something with risk” (p. 47). I know this critical voice as the voice that gets in the way of me jumping off the edge. I fear the unknown. I need safety. “Fear distorts our vision of the world, so images often manifest initially in very scary forms” (Allen, 1995, p. 197). The inner critic, resistance and fear arise as a form of protection from potential loss.

Jumping off the edge into the unknown inevitably brings with it ‘knowing’. This knowing often feels dangerous, even when the growth is positive; it involves grief and letting go. The critic tries to protect us from the “pain of change, the shame of fear... It is through our fear that we will discover something terrible about ourselves that hinders our desire to know” (Allen, 1995, p. 48).

I grapple with the critic and its desire to keep me safe and small. It argues with my thirst to grow, learn and be free. By staying with the process, I am reminded of the deeper part of myself, my core. In order to step into this unknown space

I must cultivate emotional safety.

Creating a safe space for expression is an essential component to companioning another. This is created through boundaries and being present without judgment (McNiff, 2004, p. 29), not interfering, limiting or controlling expression. Holding myself safely at the edge requires me to develop an internal companion and often to ask for companioning support from another.

When I am referring to safety, I am not talking about my physical safety. I am not afraid that I am actually going to fall off a cliff. I am speaking about my emotional and relational safety. If I explore the edges, reveal my faults and vulnerabilities, will I still be accepted in my relationships? Will I still be perceived as capable and competent in my work? Or will I be exposed as having something inherently wrong with me? This is the relational risk and an area where the critic is loud.

Being companioned relationally throughout my inquiry has supported me to receive constant and consistent feedback that I am okay, even while showing these vulnerabilities, messy and unpolished. I have come to know more about

my experiences through sharing them relationally with others. Gergen (2009) suggests that we can only know our experience through relationship. The language that exists to describe our inner world exists in order to connect with others. Our experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions are born within a relational context (pp. 60 – 95). I have come to know myself in this research through my experiences of being companioned. My inquiry into safety and the edge is a relational inquiry. It considers how I identify myself in connection with others. In this inquiry, safety does not exist in isolation, but in a relational context.

Geller (2012) refers to the stages of the process of 'therapeutic presence', "what we do, when we are present, to facilitate a deepening of relational connection and self-awareness...*receptivity, inwardly attending and extending and contact*" (p. 94). This process requires sensory and body receptivity and inwardly attending to feelings, thoughts and sensations as possible information in service of the other. It involves bringing transparency, authenticity and congruence to the relationship and offering an intuitive response (Geller, 2012, pp. 96 – 108). I have drawn parallels to the therapeutic benefits of applying these suggestions to myself in the relational context when I am at my edge, and to others I am supporting when they are at their edge. Therapeutic presence can increase the capacity to be at the edge and navigate overwhelming emotions more easefully.

Emotional Regulation & Trust

The “window of tolerance” (Siegel, 1999) is a zone measuring levels of “emotional and psychological arousal” whereby information, both internal and external, can be “processed without disrupting the functioning of the system” (p. 253). When we are hyper aroused (anxious, fearful), or hypo aroused (dissociated, numb), our ability to respond and integrate information is compromised. In order to increase the window of tolerance, Ogden (2010) suggests that we need to be working at the edges of our tolerance, “safe but not too safe” (p. 3). This is similar to my explorations of the edge, wanting to grow and expand while still attending to safety. To expand our ability to feel safe, we need to experience and attend to the emotions and sensations present at our edge of tolerance. Presence and safety are important on the edge, so that integration can occur, preferred ways of being can be established and the window of tolerance can be expanded. In figure 42 I show a visual representation based on Ogden’s (2010) pearl of wisdom (pp. 1-21).

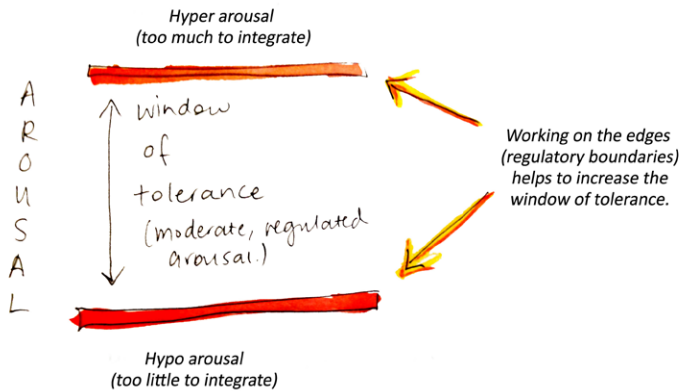


Figure 42: 'Window of Tolerance' example

As I discovered in my conversation with 'the space between', developing the routine of a consistent physical practice focused on strength and flexibility positively increases my emotional adaptability, tolerance and regulation. Similarly, a study by Avni-Babad (2011) explores the impact of routine on enhancing feelings of safety, confidence and wellbeing, over time through familiarity (p. 223-234). 'Routine' and 'flexibility' seem to be opposite qualities, however I have found correlation. The impact that routines can have on my overall feeling of safety, confidence and wellbeing in turn invites more openness and flexibility.

Routine provides strong protective boundaries and increase self-trust through repetition and predictability. Just like 'the space between' communicated: increasing my flexibility will support me to be adaptable when jumping off the edge and navigating the unknown. This becomes an internal resource for times of fear and unpredictability.

Brown (2012) confirms the importance of repetition and routine in cultivating trust. "Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention and full engagement. Trust isn't a grand gesture – it's a growing marble collection" (p. 53).

Trust requires presence. La Porte (2014) shares a process of connecting to what you trust in the present moment. Not forcing yourself to find the trust in the future, but connecting with what you trust fully right now (p. 129). Preparing for my singing performance, I attended to my felt-sense to create trust and safety. I took action to build the trust to keep moving forward.

Boundaries can be markers that show us when we are approaching our edges. For me they are essential when navigating relationships, vulnerability and intimacy.

Honoring my personal boundaries increases trust and supports me to regulate my emotions. Brown (2016) defines boundaries as "What's okay and what's not okay [for you, in relationship]" (Brown, 2016). Clear boundaries help us to sustain healthy relationships and interact with self and others compassionately and generously. Setting boundaries is taking responsibility for ones needs, valuing what's right for oneself and acting on it.

Sommers-Flannagan (1998) similarly emphasises that "boundary work is often an important component of development, self-awareness, empowerment and self-definition" (p. 39). Knowing your boundaries is a continual process that requires willingness to step into the unknown while attuning to your own needs. I have found throughout the research that attending to my own needs and making choices that attend to my needs, has supported me to safely navigate the edge and grow.

This can be seen in the presentation of the song from 'the space between'. To attend to my needs, I created a space upstairs where I felt safe and invited the audience to navigate the obstacle course to find me. I was able to make

choices about my physical performance space, a boundary, on my terms, thus feeling safe enough to explore the edge.

Acknowledgment & Acceptance as a way through

Acceptance of what is, when I'm at my 'edge' is key for me to navigate my emotional experiencing and access empowered choices. Acceptance helps me move from resistance to openness; from being stuck to being in flow. For me, acceptance is acknowledging the reality of the moment. What am I experiencing in my body, emotions, thoughts? What is the reality of the context that I exist in at that moment? Brach (2004) speaks about acceptance as "an inner process of accepting our actual, present moment experiencing" (p. 26). When something is painful, our initial reaction prior to acceptance could be: fight, flight or freeze. We may blame, tense against, avoid, deny, distract or pretend that it is not happening. Instead, as a first step towards acceptance, we can pause and set an intention to accept. We can then connect with a willingness and curiosity to be present to what is here now (Brach, 2009,

pp. 25-27).

'Focusing' (Gendlin, 1981) is a process of being present with our emotional experiencing that supports an attitude of acceptance. When I can allow the space to experience my felt-sense with curiosity and identify my needs, I am able to feel more empowered, even when I can't control my external circumstances. The process of focusing suggests that we create the space to tune into what is present and listen to its message (Gendlin, 1981, pp. 43 – 50). Similarly, Chödrön (2002) suggests practicing compassion in 'staying with' discomfort while taking the leap off the edge.

Compassion practice is daring. It involves learning to relax and allow ourselves to move gently toward what scares us. The trick to doing this is to stay with emotional distress without tightening into aversion, to let fear soften us rather than harden into resistance (p. 49).

Through compassion, focusing, becoming present, creating space for my emotional experiencing and listening to my body, I am able to attend to my needs and take positive steps towards growth.



An approximation of Meaning

To find a more easeful way of navigating the edge of growth, while attending to safety, I must continue to step to the edges of what is known. In order to live in alignment with my value of growth, I can continue to approach 'the edge' with curiosity and compassion. Like one would undertake training for a marathon, I have been undertaking 'edge' training. I've been building my capacity to navigate the edge. Repeatedly exploring the edges can expand my ability to feel safe in a wider range of situations. The challenge is in moving from resistance to openness. As 'the space between' told me, when I find myself at the edge, *'keep moving, keep moving, create some space'*.

Although this thesis is predominantly a self-inquiry, the findings can be applied to many contexts both personally and professionally. They are especially applicable to relational contexts, when facilitating others to navigate their edges, explore and grow. By providing acceptance and compassion and personally embodying these tools

for navigating the edge within, they can then be offered intersubjectively to support another to find their own meaning.

Nereo (2014) offers a most extraordinary vocal expression that elegantly brings together some of the concepts in this thesis which can be found at: <http://bit.ly/Nereo2014> (track 4).



Creative Synthesis

In each chapter of this research, a woman approaches the edge, depicted by herself on a cliff. This image is resonant of what I experience when I am at my edge. Although I have discovered that I am continuously supported relationally while I explore my edges, it often still feels like I am on my own. On completion of this research, I received an intersubjective response from Jan Allen (2016), who assessed my thesis (Figure 43). This image attends to this experience of aloneness, reminding me that 'Grace' (Figure 37) exists within me, and companions me while I am exploring my edges. This intersubjective response deeply resonated with me as a creative synthesis of what I am coming to know about exploring the edges.



Figure 43: *Creative Synthesis*

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Appendix

Workshop

As a way to further explore my research topic, I organised a short workshop with three fellow students. The following is an account of some of the meaningful moments throughout the workshop, some direct quotes from participants (*shown in italics*) and some images created by the workshop participants. The participants are three of my classmates that volunteered to explore safety and the edge. In order to refer to them in the data and keep their confidentiality, I invited them to chose pseudo names: Nuala, Anne and Goofy.

Running Sheet

Workshop Plan

Time	What	Details	What happened
0:00	Introduction	My research is about what creates safety relationally and the relationship between safety, exploring the edges, growth and transformation. In the workshop we will first explore safety individually, by creating a representation. Then there will be an opportunity share something with the group that brings you to your edge and shows us more about who you are.	
0:10	Agreements	Privacy and identification. Participants are given the opportunity to express how they would like to be identified in the research.	Each participant chose a pseudo name and agreed to non-identifying audio, video and photography recordings to be used in the research.

Navigating the Edges (Scott, A. 2016)

0:15	What is safety?	Brainstorm about what safety is, scribed on a large piece of paper	Values, communication, understanding, patience, building connection, trust, protection, trust that others will speak their truth. Value of voicing dissonance. Connection rather than being cut off. Gentle vulnerability like a baby bird. Boundaries and protection.
0:25	Represent	Create a representation about what safety is for you	
0:55	Share	Each person had a chance to share their representation and have the other participants offer their responses if they wanted to hear them.	
1:15	Share 'your edge'	What is something you could do/ share/show of yourself that would be at your edge?	Each person had 2 minutes to share in front of the small group.
1:25	Knowings	What do you now know?	Each person captured their new knowing in writing

What is Safety?

Group brainstorm and discussion about safety.

Together we speak about our experience of safety in groups. Nuala shares that she tends to be quieter in groups and that knowing people, trust and shared values create safety. The bigger the group, the quieter she is and the less she participates. The smaller the group the more comfortable she feels. Familiarity helps. Goofy and Nuala both share that communication and patience are important in creating safety. I write keywords from the group sharing (Figure 44).

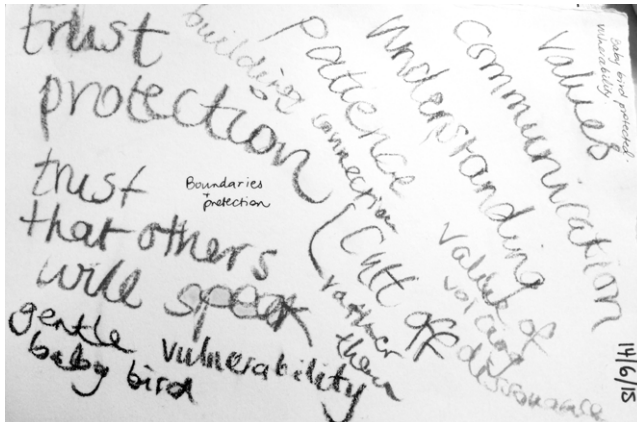


Figure 44: Safety Brainstorm

Anne says she values voicing dissonance and finds safety when she knows where she stands with another. If she senses unspoken dissonance from another, she feels unsafe. She needs to trust that others will speak up and set their boundaries. Anne feels that boundaries help to protect her vulnerability, like a baby bird.

The participants take time to individually create their representations about safety.

Goofy's Representation

Goofy starts with the blue line (beneath the collaged images). For her this feels strong and bold, severe, a very strong stroke. She wants to change it to something else, so she finds more images that draw her attention and layers them on top of the blue line (Figure 45).



Figure 45: Goofy's Safety Representation

Goofy's reflections

The angel wings picture seems very nice but constricting. It doesn't serve me; I am still not free from everything in my head. I realise there is a dark figure in the background. It is angry. It is holding something very valuable, but all the wings are chained up.

Then there is the bird, it is not fully there, but it is a step in between, the caged and the broken and dark energy. The door and stairs are some sort of lead way, lines connecting from the beginning to the end, layered up, coming from my anxieties but it can lead somewhere.

Goofy speaks about her experience of relationships and safety, she finds things easier on her own, relationships are there, they have good and bad but they are not really that important.

Or maybe they are? Maybe if I gave more respect to my relationships I would get more out of them. I didn't want to stick the images down, as they

needed to be free and open. The person folded underneath – could be relationships or it could be connecting with different parts of myself.

Reflections from the group

Angel wings to me mean having faith, reminds me of an angel standing on the edge of a cliff and being safe. If you have your wings, these are your protection/safety to take the leap into the unknown. There are a lot of layers - protective layers. Safety of having protective layers. The wooden room on the left feels caging, but the open courtyard on the right seems to me like the most realised safety – open and still held and safe.

I notice the white spaces, the spaces in between. The shadows, follows through the image from left to right, echo. In between the steps, this could be the decisions. The space representing the decisions.

I notice the light through the netting, shadows cast, light and dark. When Goofy lifts the layers up

*there is a cut out person underneath. We can't see
it unless she shows us. She shows us, but not for
long.*

Anne's Representation

Anne's Reflections

Anne is first attracted to the charcoal and starts making marks on the page, holding the idea of feeling safe in the open. This reminds her of a bird. She completes it quite quickly (Figure 46) and begins to write.

Anne then shares her writing with us.



Figure 46: Anne's Safety Representation

I feel safe when I trust that dissonance can and will be spoken in a compassionate way. Even non-compassionate voicing feels safer to me than non-speaking. I feel unsure, I don't know where I stand when I feel someone is withholding dissonance. I feel they are being relationally dishonest. My values are to air dissonance. To learn from it. And mend, change, grow. In realising/writing this I wonder if perhaps I can adjust my way of being to be at peace in interaction with people who do not value speaking dissonance. As, once again I catch myself feeling that I am 'right' in my value of speaking dissonance. I can create/establish/hold/maintain self-safety by speaking my dissonance with compassionate honesty.

Anne is exploring the idea of gentle vulnerability.

I have had dissonance with vulnerability, experiencing people being overwhelmingly vulnerable. Building forming connection rather than walls.

Anne started a second picture that she called '*A heart plant, Reaching Clarity*' (Figure 47).

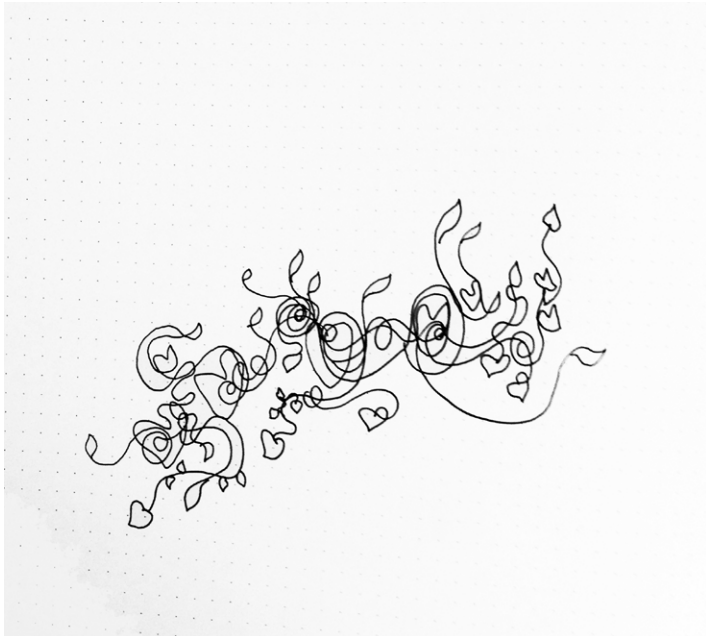


Figure 47: '*A Heart Plant: Reaching Clarity*'-Anne

This is a more preferred way of being. It is nice to be able to sit here and do my own thing. I am not writing this piece in order to share. I feel that it is relevant and so I am choosing to share it spontaneously. Coming up the edges and not hiding my vulnerability and my shadows. I am being more open with these aspects of myself.

Anne shared her written reflections to the group.

I didn't read it through again before I read it to the group. There was a bit of an exposing feeling, what will people think? Bits that I like to keep tucked behind the back. 'I am right' I am learning many different ways of being with things. If I can have that safety in myself, I don't need other people to be a certain way in order to feel the safety within. If I don't need to control other people's ways of being, then I can have more trust in myself.

Reflections from the group

I notice you are drawn to the charcoal first, (smudgy material) then the black pen, there is a sureness in the pen lines, same colour, but different feeling.

When you go from a place of being open, you feel stronger. Charcoal leads you to something so defined, can't erase it.

When I notice relational dissonance, I 'reality check' my thoughts or judgements of what people might be experiencing.

I check with the other person. Does what I am feeling or thinking about the situation resonate for them also? Is my felt sense of dissonance with this person about the relationship? Or is it just my own inner critic? If I ask the other person about it, this opens up a conversation about what is happening in the intersubjective space.

Anne then responds with her own resonance.

I had it in the group yesterday and someone was talking about someone in the group that they felt dissonance towards and I thought she was feeling dissonant towards me. So I checked with the woman, but she said it wasn't at all. So usually I would shut that person off and judge them as not sharing their dissonance. But if I didn't check with her then I would be the one actually not speaking my dissonance. It's like getting cross at someone for not doing what I'm not doing myself.

Nuala's Representation

Nuala's Reflection

I just let it unfold (Figure 48). There is a need for a circular shape meeting in the middle. It was very potent to begin with. I wanted the paint to run out so that it became more transparent.



Figure 48: *Nuala's Representation of Safety*

I felt like it needed another shape. Organic and authentic. That was really important, that natural state. The place they met became a little blurry. Togetherness, on the same page, meeting in the middle, openness, the comfort in transparency, stability, soft. Some areas are quite jarring, the soft areas are quite comforting. I find more comfort over here- the left circle. If I were in the image I would be in the softer circle. This is one particular situation/relationship. I'd love to be in the middle cross over bit but not in the blurry bit, overworked, trying too hard. Castle, strength, supported. The other areas are not supported and not even connected. Stability, support, unsupported, security.

[If I was to change it] the two shapes would have to be more overlapping. It would be without the blur, the lines are still there but more overlapping and more joint. I feel safer in the fluid flowing shape. The center of the left image is more

potent, stronger and that feels dissonant.

I feel safe in the space, in the fluidity. Too much openness, that's me when I feel safe. When I am really, really open, I am not hiding anything. There is so much stress in holding everything in. I find comfort in being very open, because I have aired everything. That is making me safe, but it is not taking responsibility for keeping others safe. I resonated when Anne spoke about holding the vulnerability.

My preferred way of being – learning to be open in a more controlled kind of way. Different things make different people safe.

My feelings of safety fluctuate in groups. Sometimes I feel safe to express, especially in intimate relationships, friendships and at MIECAT. The smaller the group, the more I will share, the bigger the group the longer it takes for me to participate.

I doubt myself a lot in big groups. A lot of doubt

*and a lot of thinking, not enough trust in myself.
It's not necessarily the people around me. Can
depend on the day. Sometimes I will be willing to
share more than other days.*

Reflections from the group

*Some of the shapes are defined and some are
flowing and fluid. The defined shape seems
stronger.*

*I love this! From a distance it looks like a city
scape, castle, cliff, sky*

Exploring the edges

Next is the invitation to share something that is an 'edge'. As there is only 15 minutes left, ask the group if they still want to do it, or to take the rest of the time to write some reflections of what they now know. They all want to share their edge but are nervous.

I notice constriction in my breathing and hesitation to continue. Asking them to explore their edges feels vulnerable for me. I don't want to push them or pressure them. I am scared they won't want to do it. Asking them to share their edges feels edgy for me too. They said they want to do it though I am still feeling resistance. I take a moment to remind myself of the value of this process. It is an opportunity for them to be witnessed and seen. Connecting to the bigger picture restores my confidence and helps me to trust in the process and continue.

I invite them to share something that takes them to their edge, for two minutes each while we witness them. I explain that it could be multi-modal, they might choose a modality they are not necessarily most comfortable with, like movement or sound. They may choose something that

they are normally comfortable with on their own, but being witnessed makes it an edge. I encourage them to keep themselves safe while choosing to explore their edge.

Nuala's Edge

My edge performance involves what feels like a long-winded howl with a stretching back movement. The howl endures as long as I can keep my breath going and I feel a sense of relief once expressing what it feels like being on the edge. I am feeling a little bit guilty because there are others in the room; it feels indulgent.

Anne's Edge

I don't want to go next, so I will go. I get really shy playing the Ukulele and singing as well. I am choosing a song I find hard to play.

Anne plays a song on Ukulele called 'Dream a little Dream of me'. It feels intimate to witness her. I feel gentle as I listen.

Goofy's Edge

Goofy shows us the edge of losing control of her anger.

Goofy is walking back and forth looking down, in quick movements, pacing. She appears to be reflecting and her focus is internal. She knows that the anger is building, but has not overflowed yet. She shows us an experience of what she does when she is on this edge.

Knowing

Nuala's Knowing

I now know that being too open is not safe. I now know that I need support to feel safe. I now realise that I need to feel an authentic connection to feel safe. I now know that I find comfort in organic shapes. I now know that I really value being understood.

Anne's Knowing

What do I think I now know? Safety is cultivated within, not gained from hiding behind stone walls. I find safety in a group through sharing similarities, seeking to understand other ways of being and learning from difference. The edge? I approach

with gentle vulnerability trusting my wings.

Goofy's Knowing

*I know there is value and the opportunity for
growth in being on the edge. I have a choice. I
now know that I can rely on the prior knowledge
and just sing the edge away.*