Living and learning in a community of inquiry:
Coming to know knowing in a self-directed doctoral seminar

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Preamble…

Speaking about knowledge. . .

What is the worth of ongoing dialogue among colleagues? Any such collaboration tells its own story of significance. Ralph Waldo Emerson was said to begin continuing conversations by asking, “What has become clear since last we met?” In our case, we were five colleagues from a faculty of education seeking to gain clarity around our own and each other’s research and writing. We came together on Tuesday afternoons prepared to share reflections on our daily experiences alongside what we were reading and writing, and elaborate the riffs we posted on-line between conversations. It wasn’t long into our journey together before an underlying direction turned up—the nature of knowledge and of knowing. This meeting point of individual interest, as a fivefold focus on epistemology, had a constant bearing on our dialogue. Our four-month road trip, so to speak, consisted of weekly commutes through the landscapes of practice, teaching, research, and philosophy. Its significance concerns our individual clarity that unfolded in the turns of understanding each other’s perspective. In the end, we chose to integrate our experience in the form of a play, situated as a road trip to an imaginary conference in Edmonton, which featured epistemology. Our story, depicted in the play, is about the nuggets we discovered together along the way. We invite you to embark upon your own journey of collaborative inquiry into epistemology.

The authors of this piece are doctoral students at Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, in conjunction with Dr. Karen Meyer who teaches in U.B.C.’s Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies. We had entered the CCFI program together as a very tiny cohort, and rapidly and fortuitously developed a fellowship together. When our coursework began to wind down, we determined to find ways to continue to work and be together, and this desire quickly, thanks largely to the generosity of Karen Meyer and CCFI’s desire to promote dialogue, became a seminar course on the topic of epistemology.

Throughout the semester we met and shared “nuggets,” or short pieces on our understanding of epistemology. This promoted wide-ranging conversation and new ways of not just knowing but learning. Ultimately, as the semester wound down, we, again under the stewardship of Dr. Karen Meyer, decided we wanted to co-construct a piece that attempted to capture the spirit of our work together, and from this desire our play was born.

Coming together to write this, was, understandably challenging given busy lives and a plethora of creative ideas, but over time we winnowed ideas and developed a piece that we felt helped to represent our
semester together. We enjoyed several opportunities to present longer and shorter versions of this play at conferences, and that editing process again challenged us to question what was most important to us about not just the topic, but the process as well.

It was a great opportunity, and we’re grateful we had this.

Introduction

In our community of inquiry we (re)imagined what living inquiry meant to each of us; we deliberately set about (re)creating a learning space dedicated to reflexivity and responsiveness embodied by the surfacing of interests, questions, and possibilities in our life and research practices. While uncertain and diffused at first, the sharing of our personal and research interests led us to a common point of entry for collaborative, and simultaneously, individualized inquiry: epistemology. Contributing short weekly pieces on epistemology, we realized possible ways in which learners (students, teachers, researchers, inquirers) can work together to consider, study, and promote effective learning environments.

In this collaboratively written play, we share our individual and collaborative learnings. Spanning the epistemological/ontological realm (How do we know something to be true? What informs this?), existential research realm (How does one's personal epistemology impact their research? How do we convey what other people know? And, for what purposes?), and pedagogical/experiential praxis realms (How do we learn? How do we learn from what we do? What are the factors that influence how teachers learn together? Do we learn how we teach? What do teachers believe about teaching? Where are the gaps? How do we negotiate the gaps? How do we effectively merge teaching and research for continual learning?), we hope to engage you in our ongoing journey of articulating the role of epistemology in framing individual and collaborative knowledge (i.e., inquiry) projects.

One of our members was rarely able to be present in person, and so joined us electronically through a laptop and wireless connection. We appreciated the opportunity technology provided to enable this member’s presence, but as is so often the case with technology, the connection frequently failed. Consequently, during the play, we refer to this frustrating engagement with technology, and his disembodied presence, as “Brent’s head.”

We chose to integrate our experience in the form of play as this genre provided us an opportunity to surface multiple voices and perspectives without smoothing over one another’s perspectives. Our play is set as a road trip to an imaginary conference in Edmonton, featuring Max van Manen as keynote speaker. We situated our story within a road trip to symbolize the ongoing journey that is our inquiry. We chose van Manen because of his interest in lived experience and life practice, which we felt represented our experience in this course.

We hope you enjoy the play. Relax, put the window down and feel the wind in your hair.

A Hitchhiker’s Guide to Epistemology

Prologue

[Dr. Fastest, professor emeritus, is sitting in his dark, messy office at UBC. Outside, snow is falling lazily. Books and papers are piled haphazardly, souvenirs of his life’s work piled about the place. A calendar, with the date 2025 is hung askew on the wall. Shawn, a new doctoral student, rushes in for a meeting with Dr. Fastest. Shawn often drops by to ask Dr. Fastest questions about why he’s here and what the real point of graduate work is.]

Shawn: What good will come out of this work? My counseling work is so much more real and important, and I know I can do so much more good out in the world. Too often I think that I want out of this ivory tower, I need to live more than theory. Real knowledge is out there, out in the world, plus I’m tired of jumping through what seem to be empty academic hoops.

By the way, what a great photo—isn’t that a 1965 red mustang? And what’s that sticking out from under all that junk, isn’t that a bumper, with a bumper sticker? What does that say? Free Knowledge? Cool! Isn’t that bumper from a 1965 mustang too?

Dr. Fastest: Ah Shawn, it may be hard to believe now young man, but I too had trouble sitting still in this academic game. Really, it’s the same now as it was before. Thinking back, those were heady days in 2005.

Shawn: So, what was different then? It seems to me none of us really do anything, we just sit here and read and write empty papers, we don’t actually do anything, just create theory. What good is this place anyway, and how was it different in 2005?
Dr Fastest: Oh you can learn so much about learning and knowing if you focus and do something that’s important to you. There was a time when I busted out of this place, and went on a road trip with four other academics, in that great old 1965 mustang. What a trip that was.

Shawn: [Usually Shawn has his backpack on ready to bolt out of the office, but this got his attention. He shrugged off his backpack, placed it on the ground, and said:] Now that’s what I’m talking about—that sounds great—where did you go?

Dr. Fastest: [Dr. Fastest leans back in his chair and stretches, arranges a few things on his desk, reaches for a cup of well-aged cold coffee.] Well, we were going to a conference about epistemology at U of A. in Edmonton, and we really wanted to hear Max van Manen as he was the keynote speaker. We all shared research interests in epistemology, lived experience, and life practice.

We drove out the number one highway on a sunny spring day, top down.

### Act 1: Scene 1

**[Parking lot at UBC. Karen is loading several bags in the trunk of a red 1965 Mustang convertible]**

Karen: Hey, Over here!

**[Karen waves her arms in the air to get their attention.]**

Diana: Oh, there she is. I wonder how this is gonna’ go—all of us in the car for God knows how many hours. Karen said this was going to be an adventure; I think she said an academic adventure. Everyone else I know is flying to the conference.

**[Karen is still waving her arms in the air.]**

Betty: I think this road trip is acting out her vision of academic disobedience. I’m game, but the thought of taking no books along…she insisted on that. That’s got to be as big a crime as plagiarizing. Well, we’ll find out if there is any such thing as original thinking.

**[Diana and Betty approach the car.]**

Diana: But I’m so used to conversing with my favourite scholars.

Karen: Hi! What do ya think? Of the car I mean. Rented it. Thought we needed a relic from the 60s, you know, make us feel free. Check out the bumper stick I found. Thought we needed a mantra.

**[Diana and Betty walk to the back of the car. Diana reads it aloud.]**
Karen: That’s the point of the road trip isn’t it? To find out? Ok, all your stuff goes in the trunk—big, eh? They don’t build cars like this anymore!

Betty: What if it rains?

Karen: Well then… We’ll find out if the top mechanism thing works. There’s probably a button on the dash. Come on Thelma and Louise, let’s get your bags in.

[Karen lifts one of Betty’s bags.]

Karen: Hey, this is pretty heavy. There aren’t any books in here are there? You’ve got freakin’ books don’t you?

Betty: Only a half a book.

Karen: What does that mean, a half a book?

Betty: I’ve already read half of it.

Diana: And, the one I brought is an edited book. Does that count? I heard that edited books don’t count much on your CV when you go up for tenure.

Karen: Nice try. No Books!! We agreed to be in the moment for once and let our own thinking unfold. Living Inquiry. Hand them over. Plenty of time for books after our journey.

[Diana and Betty reluctantly hand Karen their books. Karen puts them on the hood of the car with a bang. Betty sees Leyton heading towards the car with his pull-along suitcase and computer case.]

Betty: Hey, here comes Leyton.

[Leyton: Hi guys, sorry I'm late. Had to make sure I had all my data on the computer. Betty, Diana, and Karen: Hi Leyton! [hugs all around]}

Karen: Nice shirt!

Leyton: Karen, did you bring the IChat camera to talk to Brent? We’ll see if the world is wireless.

Karen: Yeah, let’s hope it works this time. Besides the car, that’s the only technology we’re taking.

[Diana walks towards the hood of the car where her book sits, and lays her hand on it.]

Diana: We’ll be gone for almost a week. What if I can’t sleep?

Karen: We gotta’ do this. This road trip isn’t reading break. Well it is, but remember it’s about the break.

[Leyton’s cell phone rings]

Karen: Jesus!…Oh yeah, we agreed it could come along in case of an emergency.

Betty: Ladies and gentlemen, please remember to turn off your cell phones and beepers for the journey ahead… What came first, the cell phone or the emergency?
Leyton: Ooo, is that a philosophical question?
Karen: Come on guys, let’s get loaded.

Karen: There’s one thing I want us to do before we leave. Thinking about those books and this technology makes me sure it’s the right thing to do.
Diana: What’s that?
Karen: We need to go to the Nitobe Japanese Garden; you know the one by Asian studies. We can clear our mind and meditate together.

[Diana nods in agreement. Karen shuts the trunk of the car.]
Diana: What about our books?
Karen: Leave them there. I’ll run them up to my office when we get back.
Diana: What if somebody steals them?
Karen: Yeah right! What a blessing. Stealing knowledge. Let’s free knowledge!

[Leyton notices the bumper sticker on the bumper, bends down to read it.]
Leyton: Cool! That should include practical knowledge. According to my data of what teachers say…

[Leyton looks over his shoulder and notices that the other three have started walking toward the garden. He runs to catch up.]

Act 1: Scene 2

[Karen, Leyton, Diana, and Betty walk into the garden. There is silence. They are the only people there. The morning sun is gleaming off the pond.]

Diana: Just what we needed. Good idea, Karen. Maybe we should just stay here. The trees and the light
are stunning this morning. Look at those lovely shadows on the wall over there.

Betty: [repeating a quote] The release from the bonds, the turning around from shadows to statues and the light of the fire and, then, the way up out of the cave to the sunlight...education has the power to awaken the best part of the soul and lead it upward to the study of the best among the things that are...I added the word ‘education.’

[Leyton, Diana, and Karen look at the wall and then back at the trees.]

Diana: Look there in the tree, what a beautiful spider web! It’s caught the morning dew.

Karen: See how the web disappears in my shadow? The light doesn’t change what we see. It changes how we see in that moment. The world of the known is a world of shadows. We should take care not to become caught there.

Leyton: You’d have an argument with Plato. I think the road trip has started!

Karen: Speaking of road trips, we’d better get moving. I didn’t get a parking sticker for the Mustang. Let’s hope we’re not towed by now.

Diana: And our books confiscated!

[The four head out of the garden and back to the parking lot where the mustang is parked.]

Karen: Oh Lord! I think I see the academic police at the other end of the lot.

Diana: [whispering to Betty] What’s with this academic police Karen always talks about? Who are they?

Betty: I dunno. It’s all somehow connected to her being an academic disobedient. Karen told me once about feeling like an imposter here at the university. She imagines that one day they will come into her office, announce that they found out she doesn’t know anything, and begin moving everything out of her office.

Diana: But she has tenure! Is nothing sacred?

Betty: You’d think the academy was sacred. I suppose we really police ourselves out of fear. Alternative discourse is risky. Lots to lose.

Diana: So what then is the role of the academy? Isn’t the real risk not pushing boundaries?

Karen: Come on you guys; it’s time to go.

[When Betty and Diana get to the car, Karen is in the front seat and Leyton is riding shotgun]
with his computer open. The screen shows his data. Betty and Diana get in the back seat. In a panic, Karen starts the car and steps on the gas. The car is in reverse instead of drive and hits a tree stump.

Crash!!!

Leyton: The bumper fell off! We haven’t even got out of the parking lot!

Betty: Four academics trying to get out of a parking lot! Is this ironic or just friggin’ funny.

Karen: Leyton, your office is the closest. You and I will take the bumper to your office and stash it. Diana, you take the wheel and pick us up outside Leyton’s office. Here, Leyton, use my sweater to cover up the bumper sticker.

[Karen and Leyton carry the bumper away. Diana gets behind the wheel, and Betty remains in the back seat, stunned.]

Diana: We’re not in Kansas anymore!

Betty: But we’re out of the cave.

ACT 2: Scene 1

[Diana is driving; Karen is in the front passenger seat. Betty and Leyton are in the rear seat with the computer between them.]

Let it Ride

Diana: This is such a nice change—I really want to see what learning gets borne out of our sharing some leisure time together.

Karen: [turning to look over her shoulder] Did you see that ghost car we just passed?
Diana: You mean that Smart car on the side of the road?

Karen: Yes—I’m sure it was the academic police. Take the next exit. We can’t let them catch us now—we’re just getting started!

Karen: They’ve bought another park? Ugh. Diana, don’t park in the main parking lot—[points to the right] follow the maintenance road over there.

Diana: Okay. [drives a little further then stops car.]

Diana: What a beautiful place. I think I’ll go for a walk and breathe some clean air.

Leyton: There is no signal at all in here. I think I’ll do some transcribing. [Plugs earphones into a recorder and begins typing on the computer.]

Diana: What are you working on, Leyton?

Leyton: I am revisiting my field notes from my data collection with the teachers’ inquiry group up North. Each time I revisit them, they take on another layer of meaning—each time I notice more about the teachers’ knowing.

Diana: That’s very cool. That’s one of the things that make it possible for us to inquire together: none of us are too firmly attached to our “certainties.” We are each willing to do the never-ending work of making connections between our own voices and those of others.

Karen: I’ll join you on the walk, Diana.

Betty: It’s so quiet—I think I’ll take a nap and hopefully dream about a marvellous conversation with van...
Manen.

[Diana and Karen stroll through the “forest” with background sounds of nature as “music.”]

Forest Sounds

Diana: Karen, I really appreciated your story about the spider’s web and not getting caught in only what we can see. It was a great analogy for the elusive nature of knowledge. I have recently realized how central epistemology is to my practice as a researcher. I often wonder what “knowing” gets left out because I can’t see it or it can’t be expressed in words.

Karen: It’s related to presence in research.

Diana: Oh, look at how the sun is shining in some spots in the forest here! I see how I attend to what is brightest. When I hike in the forest at home on grey, rainy days, my attention wanders at leisure; everything has an equal chance of being seen.

Karen: Yes, your attention is drawn towards the light now. It’s like the spider’s web.

Diana: It reminds me of the challenges of attending during research interviews and when I analyze transcripts.

Karen: Yes, it requires presence.

Diana: Presence again. But what is presence? Is it bare attention? And what is bare attention?

Karen: [glancing around nervously] Come closer, I’ll tell you. The trees speak and I listen. They are present. What I hear isn’t language; it’s a feeling of connectedness and awe. I recognize my essential self in the presence of the trees. It’s like...for one quick moment, we are not separate...Well...I don’t think language can make sense of presence. I wish I could teach a course called Listening to Trees 501. But, I try to extend the invitation in other ways in my teaching.

Diana: I have felt your invitation. It has opened me to ways of knowing that I have repressed since I was a child. What do you think Brent would have to say about all this?

Karen: Let’s head back to the car and see if we can reach him.

ACT 2: Scene 2

Back at the car.

Karen: [softly, so as to not wake Betty] Leyton, have you tried to reach Brent again?

Leyton: I almost had him a few minutes ago—the signal comes and goes in here. [Leyton gets out of the car, carrying the computer with him.]

Diana: [in a joking voice] You’d think Microsoft would do something about that—surely they’d want people to have full computer access in here.

[Everyone chuckles.]

Karen: Let’s climb that little knoll over there and see if it helps.
Leyton gets out of the car and walks towards the “knoll” with Karen; together they climb the “knoll.” Diana follows. Betty remains asleep in the car.

Leyton: [on top of the knoll] Okay, we have a signal up here, but it’s weak. Karen, try climbing on my shoulders.

[Karen climbs up on Leyton’s shoulders and Leyton passes the laptop up to her.]

Karen: The signal is steadily increasing.

[Betty has awoken and saunters sleepily over to the group.]

Betty: What in the name of goodness are you doing?

Karen: We just needed a little more height to get a signal to connect with Brent.

Betty: And you’re using Leyton’s shoulders? [Laughing] I have often used the Western canon as an “inspirational” pair of shoulders to climb up on—it has helped me to see much further than I would have without it—but Leyton’s shoulders…

Diana: The Western cannon? Is that with one ‘n’ or two? The development of the Christian/mechanistic/paternalistic mindset has been a great weapon against beliefs in abundance and universal fraternity.

Betty: I know, I know. But, I have a secret fear that by suppressing the canon a new dark age will grow as we all start from the beginning again. My only solace is in our access to the Eastern canon and other inspiring cultural perspectives.

Diana: Yes, our survival now seems to depend upon our bringing many cultural perspectives together. But I also wonder about the Eastern canon. Perhaps, we have to get past the great “canons” altogether.

Betty: And yet I wonder: how can we know the world beyond the canonical?

Diana: By starting with ourselves, I think. Canons separate the knower from the known and typically don’t represent any viewpoints beyond the society that develops them. Canons can’t allow for the situatedness of knowledge, but we can.

Karen: Bingo!

Hi, Brent! How are you doing? We have taken a little detour on our road trip and a walk through the forest raised some questions. We’d like to ask you about cultivating presence.

Brent: Ah, a good question!

Diana: But what about…
Karen: Oops, he’s gone again.

Karen dismounts –Leyton and Karen walk down off the knoll. The group heads towards the car.

Betty: I feel refreshed after my nap. Shall I drive now?
Diana: That would be great. Let’s go.

At the car Betty takes the driver’s seat. Leyton sits up front in the passenger seat, with the laptop on his lap. Diana and Karen are in the back seat.

ACT 3: Scene 1

Sun King

Betty: I want to pick this guy up—look what his sign says—he must be going to our conference?
Diana: Are you sure that’s a wise idea…He looks a little odd.

Betty: Oh pooh—I like odd, and besides, Brent’s vanished again, he can sit in Brent’s seat.
Betty: [yells] Hey stranger—where you headed?
Plato: Headed? I’m not sure I’m headed any one place in particular, and besides, the world around is changing at every moment. Eventually, I hope to spend time contemplating the eternal forms, but I suppose first I must pursue the demands of this world, which means I gotta get to a conference in Edmonton.
Betty: Well, I’m not sure how much help we can be with the eternal forms part, but we’re headed to a conference in Edmonton too, so we can help out with that.
Hop in—just move that laptop over, make yourself at home.
My name is Betty, and these are my travelling companions, Diana, Karen, and Leyton, and that was Brent’s head you just moved.
Plato: Pleased to meet you, my name is Plato.

Betty: Great name—What do you teach?

Plato: Oh, a little of this, a little of that, mostly moral philosophy.

Betty: Oh man—how great is that. I love the ancients, and myth and meaning making, in fact we were just talking about the nature of truth and the Western canon. What do you think truth is, Plato?

Plato: Well, I think knowledge of what is can only be gained through cultivating the best sides of our humanness, and I think the best sides are those accessed through thought and intellect. The life of the senses, while pleasurable for the moment, gives no credence to anything else, it makes life brutish and short. It is through the life of the mind that we have our best hope for mastering the pain and suffering mortality includes.

Betty: Well, I don’t know. I do know it’s hard to ignore how I feel about some things. Like how I feel about what Pascal said: “I am terrified by the eternal silence of these infinite spaces”. I think, though, we can agree that a search for the nature of truth is a valuable journey to take; now we just have to agree on what cognitive tools we need to pack. And, like you, I believe we have to be very cautious with the tools we choose.

On the other hand, I’m afraid God could be right in front of me, but because I don’t use a particular kind of tool or ruler, I’ll never see—it.

[Leyton looks up from his data entry and observes:] I think you find truth through how you live it. It’s in your daily practice.

Diana: I also think truth is in the places we don’t know, that we aren’t looking for. You may be looking so hard for just the right ruler you’re overlooking many other important things.

Karen: I agree with Leyton and Diana—I think we learn so much more from listening to the moment, that’s why I insisted none of us bring books on this trip.

Plato: There’s a text I’m fond of, the Theaetetus, which asks “what is knowledge?” This was the founding document for epistemology.

Betty: Right on, I know that text; I fear I’m a bit of a goldfish brain though—can you remind me what it says about the relative nature of truth?

Plato: With pleasure. In the Theaetetus, they cite Protagoras—the man who argued that everything is relative. I think of Protagoras as kind of a modern-day post-modernist. Socrates said that if everything is relative then Protagoras was actually being ironic, that he couldn’t possibly have made such a claim because if all is relative, then why not use the perspective of say a tadpole or a baboon; I mean, obviously he can’t make any truth claims.

Betty: Right I remember this now, although I suppose that makes a lot of sense, why should one person’s perspective have more truth than another’s?

Plato: But don’t you see the mire that creates goldfish-brain? So then any kind of wrong-headed thinking can claim it has merit just by its mere existence. When any claim has a right to be heard and taught just because it is one, judgment falls by the wayside and is replaced by the imperative to let a million flowers bloom.
Diana: You know, I’ve been pretty quiet up to now, but listening to the two of you, I can’t help but ask, what’s really wrong with letting a million flowers bloom? I’m perfectly capable of weeding through a garden of ideas and finding what I need.

Don’t you see the danger inherent in assigning yourself, or Plato, or other representatives of the Western canon as the weeders?

Leyton: Plato, what else did you have to say?

Diana: [elbows Leyton in the side and hisses at him] Leyton, shussshh! ferme la bouche!—Plato will go on forever if you encourage him; he’ll dominate this conversation just like he has thousands of others since the beginning of Western history!!!

Leyton: [quietly, in an aside] But I’m interested in everyone’s perspectives, and I don’t want to silence—OUCH, stop elbowing me, that hurts!!!

Karen: So Plato, how can you possibly resolve this?

Plato: Well, by searching for something that is of lasting and eternal value, and that is a very difficult search that requires making choices and taking responsibility for those choices.

Karen: This is making me very uneasy—any discussion about absolutes is going to cause nothing but trouble—if the academic police ever heard us having this conversation none of us would be published ever again. I don’t know what to think.

Betty: Wait, wait—I like what he says. I think we have to ask ourselves when is freedom toxic to our community and when is it healing? That means accountability and the vulnerability that comes with making choices. But, I think that to risk rejection is a better alternative to simply including everything.

Diana: I didn’t say we should just include everything, I said we should be careful about who gets to do the weeding.

Karen: You know I’m nervous about the way Plato makes assumptions about the existence of essences and absolutes.

Betty: [continues] Yeah, I think I need to expand on a kind of poststructuralist Theaetetus by continuing my investigation, and reading our modern Protagoreans, people like Derrida and Foucault. Maybe, Plato and I could continue this conversation after I’ve had an opportunity to read what they have to say.

Plato: That would be my pleasure. I’ll be here, waiting on my companion star. In the meantime, maybe you could just let me off here; I think I see an eternal form just up ahead there. Be well on your journey to epistemology everyone, for there is no finer journey to take.

[Betty pulls over to the side of the road and lets Plato out. He strolls away, backpack slung casually over his shoulder.]

[Choruses of “bye, be well, take care,” come from the car.]

Betty: What a great guy, I loved what he had to say, and he sure knew the Theaetetus! I think it’s really terrific to be able to trace the beginning of the journey about the nature of epistemology, and we sure seem to have had an expert in Plato. You know, all this talking has kind of worn me out, would anybody else like to drive for a while?

[Leyton: How’s Brent’s head—is he okay? He had to share the front seat with Plato. I’ll check. [Leyton climbs into the driver’s seat.] Well, Brent’s still off in the ether, and as I’m up here, why don’t I drive for a while.
Act 4: Scene 1

Country Music

Karen: [clearly pleased]
Where are we anyway? One minute we’re on the main highway and the next we are taking an unplanned detour!

Diana: [looks at Karen and smiles] I’m starting to like these detours. In the unexpected and unsettled moments, I’m getting a much better sense of how each of you views the world. So often I assume I know what one of you means when you share an idea, but do I? I like when we get lost and have to figure out our next steps because we each have to explain the thinking behind our statements and actions. We can’t make the usual assumptions.

Karen: I’m in no hurry. There is so much to pay attention to as we go. This journey is a living inquiry.

Leyton: I’m so glad you all liked the idea of the road trip. I can’t wait to hear what Max van Manen has to say at the conference. You know, I think that he and I will agree that research isn’t about procedure; it should be about developing awarenesses, slowing down, being open and sensitive to language and experience.

Betty: [glances back at the distance travelled already] I’d love to ask Plato what important truths are to be found in a journey like this.

Brent: [computer resting on the floor between Betty and Diana] But whose truth?

Betty, Leyton, Karen, and Diana: [in surprised and celebratory unison] Brent!

Diana: [pleased] You’re back!

Brent: [with a twinkle in his eye] No, you’re back!

Karen: [trying to continue the conversation] So, to catch you up…we’re talking about truth again. I was just about to ask these guys if there are multiple truths to be found in the same lived inquiry.

Brent: [trying to get to the concept of multiple truths] There are so many ways…

Betty: [not seeing Brent’s inferential path] What do you mean? Don’t you think that some truths are universal?
Brent: [looking for a relevant example] The Hopi would say…

Diana: [looking for clarification] Are you saying that we need to trust ourselves more?

Karen: [getting excited about the unfolding of multiple interpretations; thinks of attending to the present] Or pay better attention to what is already here inside and around us?

Brent: [taps on the screen, from the inside]
What? …

[We lose our connection with Brent.]

Leyton: [in search of some direction from the group] Darn, we’ve lost Brent again. Shall we stop for a snack in Galahad?

Betty: [heroes and quests leap to mind] Oooooo…just the name is rich with possibility.

**Act 4: Scene 2**

Betty: [clearly disappointed] Was that the town? Galahad sounded so much grander.

Diana: [a little disappointed too] Not much to see here at first glance.

Karen: [trying to get her bearings, looking around at the wonders of a dusty main street] And yet it seems hard to know what to pay attention to.

Leyton: [interested in looking at the rest of town] Anyone for a walk?

Diana: [glad for a chance to get out and walk] Sure.
Karen: [content to stay] I’d like to stay and check things out here for awhile. I brought my journal.

Betty: [nodding] I’m fine here. Karen and I will be in the pub.

Diana: [looks pleased] This road trip has been so much better than reading a bunch of articles and writing a paper by myself. Talking with all of you has opened up so many new directions. Our research interests seemed so different, and yet it turns out that we are all interested in understanding and knowing in new ways.

Leyton: [honest, but cautious] I love how we all think differently. I know that it is important to read and attend to theory, but I need to know and understand from experience up, rather than theory down.

Diana: [nods] I want to focus more on not knowing. I’m tired of writing proposals and reports that tell us what we already know, when there are stories that are not being told and alternate ways that we could try to uncover those stories.

Leyton: [attempts to clarify] I’m particularly interested in situatedness. I think that teachers, that students, that we...act, that we do, based on our own complex beliefs and influences and in response to the barriers and limitations that we perceive are around us. We are constantly theorizing what is means to be ourselves in our worlds.

Diana: [considering his point] I see this all the time with my son, Riley. I love that he is still confident to be himself and pursue his unique interests. He tells people he is not like other people. But, of course, I also see how he is conforming to some of the pressures that go along with being a teenager. I see my job as being present in the moments when I can offer something that helps him with the negotiation he has to engage in on his own.

Leyton: [empathetically] I think we’re theorizing ways of knowing right now. One way we look at the world is based on our past experiences and relationships. Being the oldest son of two blind parents has shaped ways that I look at things. I’m always thinking about how to describe something. What particular barriers or safety issues I need to make my folks aware of…

Diana: [heartfelt] It’s like being a parent.

Leyton: [suggests] And it’s perspective taking.

Diana: [tries on the idea] Absolutely. I am constantly trying on what I think it might be like to “be” Riley when I am interacting with him.

Leyton: [stops and thinks] I’m not particularly interested in changing someone’s mind about something, but I am interested in acknowledging how someone is already situated, perhaps in multiple and conflicting
ways, and that this is part of knowing and how we live our lives.

Diana: [clarifies] Not everyone has the same number of lenses as you have though.

Leyton: Agreed. I feel fortunate to have had so many influences that allow me to consider my practice from so many perspectives.

Diana: It has always bothered me that we don’t seem to ask children what they know or why they think the way they do. You had a unique experience in your childhood. I feel like our culture is stuck in the rut of telling instead of opening up new possibilities through asking questions.

Leyton: We’ve come to the end of the road. Let’s head back…Diana, I have to admit that I’m intimidated by all of your research experience. Shouldn’t you just fast track your way through this program?

Diana: [laughing] I feel like this program is barely long enough for me to figure out my practice as a researcher. It all begins with one’s epistemology. Through becoming aware of my own, I am learning how to do research differently!

Leyton: Working with teachers, finding out about their locations and passions as we talk about their practice, I’m learning about my practice as a researcher and the assumptions that I map onto others’ experience …Ah, here we are, back at the pub.

Pub Noise

Diana: [suddenly distracted] What is that noise coming from the pub?

[Inside the pub.]

Karen: [waves them over to a table] Hi guys, you’re back! Look who we met!

[Betty and Karen are sitting with Plato and a relaxed, professorial looking chap.]
Diana: Hello again Plato…and is it Socrates?

Leyton: Derrida?

Betty: [rolls her eyes] No! It’s Max van Manen!

Max: I hear you are heading up to the epistemology conference in Edmonton?

Diana: Why, yes.

Karen: [holding herself back from talking for Max] Tell them, Max. Come on!

Leyton: Shouldn’t we all get going?

Brent: [the computer is sitting on its own chair at the table] You are already there!

Max: [pointing to the screen] Correct you are!

Karen: Betty and Brent and I have been filling Max in about our road trip. Max has been encouraging us to skip the conference and continue to spend our time discussing and noticing what we are already doing and why and how we do it.

Max: You are not going to find your answers at the conference. You will discover what you do and how you do it as you spend time examining your life and research practices.

Betty: I want to write this all down before I get distracted.

Leyton: Write what?

Betty: About this experience.

Brent: And what it shows…

Diana: I’m not ready to come to any conclusions.

Karen: But what are you noticing?

Betty: I’m learning how to pay attention, and what a privilege it is to take the time to examine what I value.

Leyton: If not Edmonton, where are we going?

Brent: Let’s double back

ALL: Would anyone care to double back with us?
Postscript

This epistemological road trip has been set up as a “play” in order to show the epistemological positions which each of us brought into the conversation and highlights the points of tension that arose in our community of inquiry. What was left out of the lengthy document was the many ways in which our conversation has influenced each of us as individuals. This happened during the doctoral seminar and during each successive presentation of the “play” to an audience. We have not been able to detail the many ways in which each of us moved, and continue to move, beyond what we, as individuals, believed we knew when we entered the conversation.

Almost six months after our imagined roadtrip, we five travellers struggle to find time and opportunities to connect and delve deeply into shared inquiry. The roadtrip helped us to situate our thinking—examining our positions and influences regarding ways of knowing, and, through dialogue, we came to understand one another and different orientations to epistemology. We need to take more roadtrips—extended roadtrips. Our doctoral seminar is but one example of how individuals, living in different cities, bringing unique personal histories and varied, sometimes contrasting, disciplinary knowledge can engage in considered, responsive inquiry when they commit to a time, place, purpose, and process.

Even as we articulated our stances, we discovered the fluidity of (our) knowing, being, and learning. Leyton is now seeking connections between his practice-based notions of knowing and Betty’s Ancients. Diana is exploring performative means to further inquire into knowing/not knowing. Karen continues to reshape her Living Inquiry course by sustaining class dialogue that mines differing conceptions of what it means to learn, to know, and to be an academic.

What trips would we embark on next? Leyton is eager to get Aristotle in the car and to hear the different questions each of his fellow “roadtrippers” might ask. Diana thinks we could rap on post-structuralism across a couple provinces. Betty wants us to use our divergent backgrounds to theorize and articulate narrative inquiry as both philosophy and methodology. Somewhere, Brent is retracing what he has just done to see where self-design and curriculum meet. For each of us, coming back together would mean a chance to step away from our individual situated inquiries to (re)consider the plurality of knowingness that working within a community of inquiry provides. Karen asks only for a commitment to careful attention.

Books or no books, academic police, real or imagined, when we pay attention to what we know, what we wonder, and what informs our conceptions of knowing, being, and academia, we can push our thinking to cross disciplines, assumptions, and research agendas.

Readings that have inspired our thoughts


About the Authors

**Diana Nicholson** has worked as a researcher in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria for the last decade. Her recent academic work has focused primarily on youth violence, but also includes work on participatory inquiry in learning communities, the development of a needs assessment guide for at-risk youth, and gender-sensitive staff training curricula for a youth custody centre. Her move to doctoral studies in the Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education at the University of British Columbia was prompted by an interest in exploring the importance of ‘not knowing’ to inquiry in learning communities. Diana’s dissertation research explores with youth their experiences with “knowledge.”

**Leyton Schnellert** is a doctoral student in UBC’s Centre for Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education. His research interests fall in the areas of inquiry communities and communities of practice as they relate to student learning, literacy instruction, and teacher professional development. He works part time as an Inservice Faculty Associate in SFU’s Field Programs where he supports teachers completing self-directed graduate diplomas in the areas of diversity, literacy, and instructional methodologies. He also supports school districts, schools, and action research groups throughout British Columbia and the Southern Arctic to examine links between theories and practices. Leyton may be reached at: leytons@sfu.ca.

**Betty Rideout** is a doctoral student at the Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests include the construction of religious belief in non-religiously affiliated young adults, construction of and epistemological evaluation of meaning, and the influence of historical meta-narratives upon belief.

**Karen Meyer** is interested in re-imagining academic community, particularly around graduate studies. She is exploring pedagogical spaces and alternative ways of engaging in academic contexts; the asking of ourselves, *How do we want to be in the academy?* And, as academics, our follow up question becomes, *what is our relationship and contribution within local and global communities:* Karen is currently writing a book with the working title, “Re-imagining Academic Communities” based on my experiences of transgressing academic borders.

**Brent Cameron** is the founder of Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning, and co-creator of the SelfDesign Learning Community, an on-line learning village. He has won numerous Canadian awards for the programs and projects he has created with learners and colleagues over the past two decades.

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